

**MUNSHI
HIS ART AND WORK**

Volume III

MAN OF LETTERS

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HIS ART AND WORK
COMMEMORATION VOLUME

MUNSHI His Art and Work

Volume III
MAN OF LETTERS

EDITORS

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SHRI MUNSHI SEVENTIETH BIRTHDAY
CITIZENS' CELEBRATIONS COMMITTEE

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CONTENTS

<i>Chapters</i>	<i>Page</i>
1. Introductory	3
2. Social Plays	11
3. Social Novels	21
4. Historical Romances I	37
5. Historical Romances II	41
6. Historical Romances III	61
7. Historical Romances IV	74
8. Historical Romances V	90
9. An Epic of the Ancient Aryans I	108
10. An Epic of the Ancient Aryans II	144
11. An Epic of the Ancient Aryans III	190
12. Tapasvini	230
13. Autobiographical Works	308
14. Miscellaneous Writings	317
15. Works in English	324
16. Munshi on his own Works	348

PREFACE

We have great pleasure in bringing out this volume as a homage to Shri K. M. Munshi whose seventieth birthday was celebrated on December 30, 1956.

On the occasion of Shri Munshi's sixtieth birthday in 1946 some of his friends and admirers published a volume entitled "Munshi: His Art and Work". Since then Shri Munshi has filled various high offices and we felt that it should be brought up-to-date and brief accounts of his activities as the Agent-General of the Government of India at Hyderabad, the Food Minister of India and the Governor of Uttar Pradesh should be included in a survey of his life and work. A short narrative of his early life has been added so that the readers may appreciate the struggles he had to face in his youth. Some other chapters, such as Shri Munshi's place in Gujarati literature, and "Munshi and his message", have also been specially written for this edition.

To keep the price of the book within the reach of the average reader it has been decided to publish it in a cheap edition and divide it into four volumes. The first volume contains the story of Shri Munshi's early life, and his career as a lawyer; the second volume deals with his political activities, while the third and the fourth deal with his literary and cultural activities respectively. How far this compartmental treatment of Shri Munshi's biography is successful, it is for the readers to judge. We would only point out that his career has been so varied that it is difficult for any individual to describe it adequately though we hope some day and in the not too distant future a real biography of Shri Munshi will be written for the coming generations for whom his amazing career should serve as an inspiration.

All the contributors of this and the other volumes have known Shri Munshi more or less intimately. By a happy chance they come from different states of India to pay him their heartfelt tribute. And that is as it should be. For, his most cherished ideal in life has been the concept of Mother India, one and indivisible. To Her worship he has dedicated his life and in all his activities, in his writings, speeches, social and political work, the same motif appears as the incessant refrain: *Vande Mataram.*

Editors

MAN OF LETTERS

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

LAWYER, patriot, reformer, scholar, educationist, lover of art, novelist, dramatist, journalist, legislator, administrator, humanitarian, and idealist—Munshi has many great achievements to his name, both as a man of action and as a man of letters. His vitality is untouched by time, it is of the spirit. Age sits lightly on his scarcely-wrinkled brow!

Only those who know him intimately realise how active are his habits, how agile his mind. His buoyant nature, animated outlook and daring directness—astonishing, delighting, amusing, shocking and sometimes irritating—are the abiding graces and ruling characteristics of a man, who at three score years and ten is at once the wonder and despair of persons far younger. He strives and holds cheap the strain, learns nor accounts the pang; dares, but never grudges the price he often has to pay for his daring.

‘Tameless and swift and proud,’ he is ever alert. It is no exaggeration to say of Munshi what Swinburne said of Browning ‘His ebullient spirit leaps and lightens to and fro and backward and forward as it lives along the animated lines of its labour, springs from thread to thread and darts from centre to circumference of the glittering and quivering web of living thought, woven from the inexhaustible stores of his perception and kindled by the inexhaustible fire of his imagination’.

Munshi challenges attention as a man of letters by the versatility of his interests and the prodigiousness of his gifts. In Gujarati, his mother-tongue, he has written

novels, stories, romances, historical and *puranic* dramas, plays, biographies and critical and miscellaneous essays and addresses. He has published several works in English, including some on history, and a comprehensive work, *Gujarat and Its Literature*.

In all these writings, whether Gujarati or English, Munshi evinces an intellectual integrity and an imaginative vigour which grip both his Indian and his foreign readers. A scholar and a devotee of our ancient culture, Munshi is fired with enthusiasm for all that is good, beautiful and true, dreams as well as deeds. And the manner in which he expresses himself on these matters is as attractive as the substance of his writings.

A master of the spoken and the written word, Munshi never fails to energise the minds of his hearers or readers. He knows the value of words, the worth of phrases, the charm of chaste and idiomatic utterance. Munshi, the man of letters, illustrates the truth of the Shavian saying: 'This is the true joy of life, the being used for a purpose recognised by yourself as a mighty one...the being a force of Nature instead of being a feverish selfish little clod of ailments and grievances complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy'

From his college days, Munshi has revelled in European literature Dumas, Hugo and Scott, Goethe and Shelly, and the moderns with Ibsen at their head have been his literary godfathers. His true strength has lain in deriving power and vigour of thought and expression from his reading, infusing his materials in the crucible of his imagination and producing works of lasting worth. Munshi has always acknowledged his indebtedness to his favourite authors.

As a writer of Gujarati prose, Munshi is in the first rank. Many think he has no equal among the modern

writers of Gujarati prose. His creative pen has infused new life and beauty into Gujarati fiction and drama, and the philosophy of life preached by him in his works has given to Gujarat both joy and strength. That tribute was paid to him by Professor I. J. S. Taraporevala in 1934, and it holds equally good to-day.

Munshi started his literary career when he was about twenty-five years of age, under the pen-name of 'Ghan-shyam'. At the very outset of his literary career, he was both violently attacked and enthusiastically admired: attacked by those who did not like the unconventionality of his ideas and expression, and admired by those who welcomed him for precisely the same unconventionality.

That Munshi made his mark from the very beginning is clear from the reference to him in Dewan Bahadur Krishnalal M. Jhaveri's *Further Milestones of Gujarati Literature* (1921). 'Recently a novelist, worthy of the first rank among the writers of that class, suddenly blossomed out. Till he began in 1911 with some short stories and published them with great hesitation, concealing his own identity under the significant *nom-de-plume* Ghan-shyam, no one suspected that he had latent powers. In the opinion of many, Kanaiyalal has, by adhering to the correct canons of novel-writing and by his powerful delineation of human character, dislodged his senior, Govardhanram. Kanaiyalal's style is always suited to the occasion. There may be in his writings a recklessness in the spelling of words; there might be an unconscious echo of English phrases translated into Gujarati, but on the whole, the style is virile, vigorous, cultured and chaste.'

Since then, in spite of his pre-occupation with the legal profession and with manifold public activities, Munshi has found time to pour forth an uninterrupted stream of stories, novels, plays and essays.

Modern Gujarati literature is rich, varied and progressive, great in its freedom, its art, its technique and its inspiring quality. Not a little of this is due to the advent of Munshi among the ranks of its writers.

Munshi's works in Gujarati are characterised by volume, variety and vigour. They may be classified into groups as follows:

I. SOCIAL PLAYS: *Vava Sheth-nu Svatantrya* (The Freedom of Vava Sheth, 1915) ; (2) *Be Kharab Jan* (Two Bad Persons, 1924) ; (3) *Agnankita* (The Obedient, 1927) : all the three published in one volume entitled *Samajik Natako* (Social Plays) ; (4) *Kaka-ni Shashi* (The Uncle's Shashi, 1929) ; (5) *Brahmacharyashrama* (The Hermitage of Continence, 1931) ; (6) *Pidagrast Professor* (The Afflicted Professor, 1933) ; (7) *Dr. Madhurika* (1947) ; (8) *Chiye Tej Thik* (Best as We are, 1948) and (9) *Vah re me Vah* (Well-done, Myself, 1949).

II. SOCIAL NOVELS: (1) *Ver-m Vasulat* (Revenge Accomplished, 1913-14) ; (2) *Kono Vank?* (Whose Fault? 1914-16) ; (3) *Svapnadrishta* (The Dreamer, 1924-25) ; (4) *Sneha-Sambhrama* (Confusion in love, 1931-32) and (5) *Tapasvini*, Vol I, II, III (1957-58).

III. SHORT STORIES: *Mari Kamla Ane Biji Vato* (A collection of short stories in one volume)

IV. HISTORICAL ROMANCES AND DRAMA: (1) *Patan-ni Prabhuta* (The Greatness of Patan, 1916), (2) *Gujarat-no Nath* (Lord of Gujarat, 1918-19), (3) *Rajadhiraja* (King of Kings, 1922-23). These three volumes constitute a splendid trilogy on the Chaulukyas of Gujarat, (4) *Prithvi Vallabh* (The Darling of the Earth, 1920-21), (5) *Bhagawan Kautilya* (Lord Kautilya, 1924-25) · the first of another series dealing with the Imperial Mauryas; (6) *Dhruvaswamini Devi* (A drama, 1928), (7) *Jaya Somnath*

and (8) *Bhagna-Paduka* (Broken Sandals, 1954) dealing with the fall of Chaulukyan Gujarat.

V. PURANIC DRAMAS AND NOVELS based on the ancient traditions of India. (1) *Purandara Parajaya* (The Conquest of Indra, 1922), (2) *Avibhakta Atma* (The Soul Undivided, 1923); (3) *Tarpana* (The Obsequial Offering, 1924); (4) *Putra Samovadi* (Like Unto a Son, 1929); (5) *Lopamudra* (1933), which consists of one novel *Vishvaratha*, and three plays; (6) *Shambar-Kanya*; (7) *Deve Didheli* and (8) *Vishvamitra Rishi*, dealing with the life of the Rigvedic Vishvamitra Rishi, and the first authentic incident of Indian history, the war between the Aryan King Divodasa and the Dasyu King, Shambara. There are also two novels. (9) *Lomaharshini* (1945) and (10) *Bhagawan Parashurama* (1946). It may appropriately be mentioned here that these ten of Munshi's novels and dramas deal with material drawn from the myths of the *Rigveda*, the *Mahabharata* and the *Puranas*. Considered in the chronological sequence of their subjects, and not in the order in which they were written and published, these novels and dramas constitute what one may call an 'Epic of the Ancient Aryans.' In them, perhaps, we have the most original and hence the most noteworthy writing that Munshi has done. The various works were written at different times over a period extending through twenty-three years, but they have an artistic coherence and an architectural unity which make the long dead past live again, and the characters come stepping out alive, out of that past.

VI. AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL: (1) *Adhe Raste* (Half Way, 1857-1906); (2) *Seedhan Chadan* (Steep Ascent, 1907-22, 1943); (3) *Swapnasiddhi Ni Shodhama* (In Search of a Dream, 1922-26), (4) *Mari Binjavabdar Kahani* (My Irresponsible story), (5) *Travel to*

Europe (1943) and *Shishu Ane Sakhi* (The Child and the Comrade, 1932).

VII MISCELLANEOUS: (1) *Ketlaka Lekha* (Some Writings, 1925-26), Volumes I and II, comprising essays, addresses and character sketches, (2) *Gujarat-na Jyotirdharo* (Leading Lights of Gujarat); (3) *Thodank Rasadarshano* (Some Interpretations of Beauty, 1930), being a study of literary art and of *Bhakti* with special reference to Gujarati Literature; (4) *Narsaiyo Bhakta Harino* (1933), a life of the poet Narasimha Mehta, with a critical introduction dealing with his works and time; (5) *Narmad*, a biography of Narmad, the first author of modern Gujarati literature, (6) *Adi Vachano* I and II (1933), inaugural addresses (1923 to 1929); (7) *Gujarati-ni Asmita* (1936) and (9) *Parishadne Pramukh Padethi* (1955), a collection of addresses delivered by Munshi as President of the Gujarati Sahitya Parishad.

Equally varied in theme are Munshi's books in English which number about twenty. They range from political polemics to philosophy. His *Gujarat and its Literature* is a monumental book of literary history and criticism. To the *Social Welfare*, an English weekly of which he was Editor for six years, Munshi regularly contributed articles and essays covering a wide range of subjects. His well-known series of *Kulapati's Letters* delights and instructs tens of thousand of readers throughout the country every fortnight for the last six years.

Munshi's English writings may be divided into four groups: historical, political, philosophical and miscellaneous.

I HISTORICAL *The Early Aryans in Gujarat* (1938); *The Glory that was Gurjaradesa* (1934); *Somanath, the Shrine Eternal* (1951), *Gujarata and its Literature* (1935) and *The Saga of Indian Sculpture* (1957).

II. POLITICAL. *I follow the Mahatma* (1940);

Akhand Hindustan (1942); *The Indian Deadlock* (1945); *The Ruin that Britain Wrought* (1946); *The Changing Shape of Indian Politics* (1946); *Gandhi the Master* (1948) and *The End of an Era* (1957).

III. PHILOSOPHICAL: *The Creative Art of Life* (1946); *Bhagavad Gita and Modern Life* (1946) and *Our Greatest Need and Other Essays* (1953).

IV. MISCELLANEOUS. *Sparks from the Anvil* (1951); *Janu's Death and Other Kulapati's Letters* (1954); *City of Paradise and Other Kulapati's Letters* (1954), *To Badrinath* (1953); *The Wolf Boy and Other Kulapati's Letters* (1956); and *Sparks from a Governor's Anvil* (1957) in two volumes

Munshi's literary works, whether in English or Gujarati, bear the stamp of his ebullient personality. As a writer with original ideas and a new technique, as one who delights to seek fresh fields and pastures new, Munshi will long be remembered and cherished not only as one of the makers of modern Indian literature, but as one who has broadened its frontiers and widened its vision.

Real literature is revelation; and all literature worthy of the name is the expression of the writer's life, of his aspirations, and of his ultimate aims. To delight by stimulating the imagination, to give a new beauty to existence by widening the realm of thought are some of the noblest purposes achieved by real artists. Munshi may well feel proud to belong to that distinguished company. Such artists are truly the voice of the Earth, the Earth whose poetry is never dead. Unmindful of the reward for their self-chosen work, they dare human respect, politeness, modesty, the timidity of social ties under which the heart is stifled. In the words of Romain Rolland, 'if nobody is to be affronted and success attained, a man must be resigned all his life to remain bound by

convention and to give to second-rate people the second-rate truth, mitigated, diluted, which they are capable of receiving.' Real artists like Munshi do not belong to this category. He has the honour of having dared to go against many literary conventions and having succeeded in his adventure.

Most people live as comfortable worldlings, lured by no hope, beckoned by no dream, guided by no impulse, stirred by no emotion, inspired by no ambition, loving nothing on this earth and cherishing nothing beyond it, partaking neither in human joy nor in human grief, doing nothing, neither creating nor destroying. To lead such an unfruitful life is worse than existing as a block of wood or as a piece of stone. On the other hand, to live actively and fully, giving scope to all your faculties, and in a manner useful to yourself and to others, to touch life at as many points as possible and to thrill it at some points at least, to create goodness and greatness, to become a fountain-source whence the minds of other men may draw strength and beauty, this certainly is to live gloriously. Such has been the life of Munshi as a writer and as a public worker.

CHAPTER II

SOCIAL PLAYS

WHENEVER it has rebelled against the restrictions of a convention-ridden society, literature has not only been the most powerful vehicle for the spread of new and progressive ideas, but has brought about radical changes in the thoughts and lives of men and altered the course of history and civilisation. Of Munshi it may be said that he belongs to the group of writers which has succeeded in blending its reforming zeal with its artistic talent and which includes such towering figures as Moliere, Fielding, Dickens, Henrik Ibsen and Bernard Shaw. It is no exaggeration to say that 'it was not till Munshi took up his pen to write social plays that certain prohibitions met their Waterloo' In a jovial, critical, mocking vein, he faced topics hitherto ignored and showed their absurdity and their mal-effects.'

Munshi's social plays are all sparkling productions, topical in their themes and racy in their tone and spirit. As the author himself once admitted, not without a twinkle in his eye, they are not to be read by those who are in love with respectability. Thoroughly modern in spirit and utterly unconventional in outlook, they upset the placidity of old ideas and settled conventions. It is precisely for this reason that these plays are the hot favourites of the younger generation, and are frequently staged by aspiring amateurs.

The main targets of these plays are the hypocrisies and foibles of society. They deal with the realities of ordinary everyday existence and convey their meanings and morals with rollicking comedy and hearty laughter,

with the understanding humour which recognises its kinship with humanity.

In his *Brahmacharyashrama*, which Munshi calls a farce, he ridicules the whole ideology of continence on practical grounds. The play, by itself, is delightful to read and has the irresistible ring of truth about it. It was written while the author was in the Yeravada Central Prison and the opening scene gives a realistic picture of jail life.

Dr. Madhubhai has discovered a panacea which can 'make Gods of men', and he is in search of recruits to try it on and to spread its use. Among his fellow-prisoners, he finds individuals from the learned professions, business magnates, and others whom he wins over to his creed. They decide to open a Continence Home on the banks of the Reva after their release, and dedicate their lives to its service. It is easy, the doctor explains his panacea, to take and follow the vow of continence, and to forget even the existence of woman.

Time passes; and we see them all at the ashram, none the worse for their vow. Their enthusiasm is whipped up now and again by Dr Madhubhai and things go exceedingly well till the cook, Daji, falls ill and sends his niece, Pemli, in his stead. Her presence sets the ashramites by the ears. They quarrel over her, and one by one they leave the ashram and their vow, and ultimately Madhubhai himself falls in love with Pemli to the amazement of the last inmates.

The arguments advanced by the various apostles of continence for inviting Pemli to cook for them, the reasons they give in explanation of their acts of service to her, display the author's sense of sardonic humour and deep knowledge of human nature, specially in the scenes where the amorous ashramites are disturbed in their furtive

interludes with Pemli by the inopportune arrival of one or other of the fellows. Pemli, with her rural dialect and shrewd insight, is well-drawn. Her sense of honour and rectitude is shown to be higher than that of some of the inmates themselves, though she is just a country girl and has taken no vow of continence like them.

Another equally humorous play, 'The Afflicted Professor', *Pidagrast Professor*, has for its theme the relation between professor and pupil and shows how things can go wrong unless the character of both are strong and upright. Mohini and Vasumati are impressed by the personality and appearance of Prof. Pritamlal and Vasumati thinks more of him than of her braggart husband, Shamsher Bahadur Jorawarsinh.

They are all invited to a house-party at the unwitting Tribhovandas's residence at Chinchan Tarapore. There the friends of Tribhovandas, disguised as robbers, raid the house at night as a practical joke. The boastful, cowardly Jorawarsinh is exposed and his wife, Vasumati, feels ashamed of him, particularly when she sees Pritamlal rise to the occasion and defend the house. She decides to elope with Pritamlal, and gets ready to do so.

Fortunately, Jorawarsinh happens to get scent of it in time to throw himself on her mercy and she listens to her helpless husband and leaves Bombay in his company. Soon after, Pritamlal comes in search of Vasumati and is surprised to learn that she has left only a message for him. "For me?" he asks, eagerly, breathlessly. "What is it?" "Good-bye," comes the crushing answer.

The exposure of Jorawarsinh at the country house, and the just shock that Pritamlal receives at the end are among the highlights of the comedy. The attitude of college students towards their professors and the temper of Mrs. Pritamlal as an invalid shrew are vividly drawn.

In *Kaka-ni Shashi*, the theme is serious and deals with the status of women. The women's emancipation movement is depicted with typical Munshian mockery. Shashikala, a young graduate, lives with her guardian who, she is led to believe, is her uncle. On her attaining majority, as she is to inherit her ancestral property, she decides to live as an independent person, away from her 'Uncle' Manharlal.

Later in a touching scene, she comes to know who she is, who 'Uncle' is, how they met and why he did not reveal his identity to her. She is thereupon overcome with love for him and realises that it is hardly possible for women to live all by themselves despite their protestations to the contrary. Her resolve to live apart from man as an emancipated woman evaporates into thin air, as did the vow of continence of the inmates of the Continence Home in *Brahmacharyashrama*.

This is one of the best plays of Munshi. In language, characterisation, plot and action, he has very ably fulfilled his purpose. The humour and satire are subdued and are aptly introduced. The depiction of Shashikala, the New Woman, is pleasant. One sees that behind her modern attitude and new-fangled ideas, there is a human heart pulsating. Like the Shavian New Woman, she is intelligent, energetic, witty. Like her, too, she knows what she wants and how to get it. The other characters of the play receive proper attention from their creator.

In *Samajik Natako*, which consists of three plays, the author deals with social evils. In the first of these, *Vava Sheth-nu Svatantrya* (The Independence of Vava Sheth), we see the henpecked Vava Sheth making a bid for liberty (after the fashion of Belgium during World War I) from the iron domination of his shrewish wife, Reva. He meets a young lady and, in the first flush of his

new-found liberty, indulges in practical jokes with her on the Churchgate sands, in a manner unbecoming his age and dignity. Later, he finds out that this young lady is no other than Radha, whom his son Mangal loves and the daughter of the insolvent Damodar Desai. He even contemplates marriage with her and holds the 'threat' of this marriage over his tyrant-wife, Reva, and thus brings her to submission. Eventually, Mangal, the son, and Radha are happily united.

In this and the other two plays of this volume, there are indications that they are among the earlier writings of the author. Certain scenes of this play, and of *Be Kharab Jan*, which follows, are difficult to stage. The dialogue, moreover, does not have the same sparkle as it has in his later writings—though this may have been done deliberately to stress the 'level' of characters like Reva.

Agnankita, The Obedient One, is a satire on unequal marriages and a false sense of duty. It portrays a social life in which young women are married off for money to men decrepit, feeble, old and diseased, in flagrant violation of their own reasonable and declared wishes; where such men are eager and willing to marry for the fifth time; where morality is sadly conspicuous by its glaring absence, where a nephew, out of a false sense of rectitude and duty, is prepared to give up his betrothed and accept her as his uncle's wife; where a husband accepts and expects forced worship from his wife; where to please a dying uncle a nephew is prepared to call persons from disreputable quarters against his own better judgment. This social weakness is exposed with a mordant wit and condemned with a just wrath which provokes thought and is not without its effect upon the readers, specially those of the younger generation.

Dhirajlal, an over-dutiful and convention-abiding

nephew, sacrifices Savita, his betrothed, on the altar of so-called duty, and marries her sister, Kamala, who laughs at his antediluvian notions. Savita is 'sold' to the oft-wedded Harkisondas who dies later, leaving her a girl-widow. Both Savita and her sister rebel against their helpless lot, but to no great avail. People spending money in indiscriminate and wasteful charity receive their proper meed of fun in this drama.

The play is a bitter and cynical comment on the sorry spectacle of one aspect of social life. The author, in a note at the beginning of the play, reminds us that so long as this state of society continues, such plays will have an important function to discharge. Realism demands these plays. Dhirajlal, in the play, becomes a by-word for ill-conceived and false 'obedience' which does more harm than it can cure. One feels that what Dhirajlal suffers from is not so much a duty-complex as a fear-complex.

The third play is a delightful, though a fantastic, comedy. *Two Bad Persons* shows how inflammable the modern generation is. Rambha is a go-getter and not a meek submissive woman who bows to her unhappy lot. She loves a newly qualified doctor, Mohan, a dashing, gay, irresponsible, debonair young man. She declines to fall for riches and position when they are presented to her in the person of an England-returned suitor, Ramdas Dagliwala. The time-worn devices of escapades and disguises break down - timely departures; tomfoolery helps to keep the action lively.

Though it is the longest of the plays in the book, the action and dialogue do not flag or falter. Humorous situations are plentiful though not all of the same level. Rambha is being driven by her father to the marriage pandal, but near Worli the car breaks down, giving the distressed damsel an opportunity to escape. She seizes

it with alacrity, and happens to meet Dr Mohan Eventually, Parshottamdas Popda, the father, arrives late at the marriage-pandal and without the eagerly-awaited bride The wedding has to be postponed and distinguished guests turned away.

Rambha is later retaken but informs press reporters that she is married to Dr Mohan This news is front-paged and creates a sensation all over the town. In spite of denials and contradictions, people, including the disappointed, one-time bridegroom, Ramdas, believe the news to be correct, he is told by Rambha that now marriage with her would amount to bigamy for which the punishment is heavy He thereupon departs crest-fallen and Rambha has her way

The last comedy, recently written by the author, is a brilliant farce. *Vah re me vah* (Well done Myself, Well done) is a sketch in which the author has satirised himself, a rare thing in literature In the first act, the author then occupying the office of Agent-General to the Government of India in Hyderabad (1948) is shown in his library busy with many matters from literature and education to politics A telephone call is received from Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel informing Munshi that Police Action is being launched against the Nizam and that he should return to Hyderabad at once The author then dozes off.

In the second act, the prominent heroines of his novels and dramas come to him blaming him for the misfortunes through which he made them pass They all upbraid him until Tanman, the heroine of *Ver-ni Vasulat*, appears and taunts them in defence of Munshi. Shrimati Munshi, now comes and reminds him that he has to leave at once for Hyderabad.

Munshi falls asleep again Now the prominent comic characters of his works appear, anxious to accompany him

to Hyderabad, in order to be ready at hand should anything happen to him. In the end, they all come to the conclusion that the author is a fool to risk his life in such a mad venture.

In the third act, some of the heroes of the author's works come and offer to accompany him and to render him assistance, each in his characteristic manner. They become so enthusiastic showing him what he must do that he is dazed and alarmed. They call for him to fight unto death. Shaken by the insistent demand for bravery, Munshi hides himself under the sofa when Shrimati Munshi enters the room. The heroes vanish. Munshi comes out from under the sofa trying in vain to screw up his courage. His courage is restored when he realises that his wife thinks him a very brave person.

Munshi has the rare gift of self-analysis. He sees himself as others see him, and judges and values himself from their point of view. With characteristic objectivity, he has estimated the worth of his own social dramas: 'The social plays exhibit much greater realism (than the Puranic and historical dramas) and what may for convenience be called the comic spirit hunts down folly and foible through humour, satire, mockery and fun.'

In *Vava Sheeth-nu Svatantrya*, the comic spirit makes fun of an elderly hen-pecked husband who seeks relief in flirtation with a young girl; in *Be Kharab Jan* it pursues parents who want to wed an educated daughter to a conceited prig of a millionaire; in *Agnankita*, the spirit savagely pillories the rich old man who buys a spirited girl for a wife, and the timid lover who prefers respectability to love, in *Kaka-ni Shashi*, it hunts folly in the suffragette, the flirt, the schoolmaster, the virago, the poet and the tyrannical head of the family; in *Brahma-charyashrama*, a broad farce, it hunts with shout and hallo,

the little follies of political prisoners, the stupidity of the impossible idealist who believes that sexual self-control brings immortality, and the prude in man which covers sex-attraction under every plausible guise; and in *Vah re me vah* the author laughs at himself with thorough abandon, at the same time making fun of his heroes and heroines.

'Whether the hunt has been successful in each case' says Munshi, 'is not for me to judge. I have not succeeded with humour, as with satire, mockery and malicious fun, if by humour is meant, as Carlyle said, sympathy with the seamy side of things'.

The last part of the analysis raises deep aesthetic questions which need not be gone into here. It may be stated, however, that Munshi's humour, mixed as it is with various other ingredients, answers to George Meredith's conception of the Comic Spirit as 'the Sword of Common-sense, the Sweep of Hawk over Heron'.

Literature has always been the reflection of life, and the society depicted in these plays is of both the old order and the new. The reforms suggested indicate the pains the author has taken to study life, its happiness and its misery, and he deals boldly with such crying social problems as reform of the marriage system and improvement of the status of women in keeping with the conditions of the day. In order to stress his point, Munshi sometimes resorts to exaggeration and possibly to distortion, but not too glaringly.

As has been pointed out by some critics, in his plays he left the old and beaten paths of Gujarati drama—the practice of always having acts and scenes. Songs are seldom used. He follows more the plays of today than the traditional dramas of old. The dialogue is racy and homely and the situations such as would be met with in life. The social

'revolt' of the younger generation against what it considers evil and repellent is the burden of some of his plays as it is also their motif. The villain is more the social evil represented through the agency of men, than any particular human trait or frailty. In this, the plays resemble distantly the Moralities of the West, where the audience witnessed a struggle between Good and Evil.

The women characters seem to possess more of the *esprit de vivre* than the male characters and are endowed with more energy, loquacity and sense. They are not the shy, retiring, meek sort, but mostly educated women with a will of their own. They seem to be faithful observers of the *Sanjivani Mantra* and know no submission to tyranny or wrong. The substance of the commandment—'This above all to thine own self be true'—is rarely lost sight of by them. They are prepared to fight to the last in defence of their convictions, even to lose their happiness in the achievement of those convictions.

In the end, speaking by and large, we may say that Munshi has told his readers some harsh truths rather than soft falsehoods for their own ultimate advantage. In doing this, he has salted his suggestions and satire with humour and pathos and has given the Gujarati-speaking world a wealth of drama which it can remember with pride.

CHAPTER III

THE SOCIAL NOVELS

SOMERSET MAUGHAM once said that a good novel should possess 'a coherent and plausible story, a variety of probable incidents, characters that are living and freshly observed, and natural dialogue. It should be written in a style suitable to the subject. If the novelist can do that, and it's a lot, I think he has done all that should be asked of him' If this criterion is applied to the novels of Munshi, they will successfully stand the test and rank with the best of their kind

It is natural for a writer to remember his own experiences when constructing the plots of his novels. In this sense, every novel may be said to be in part the autobiography of the author himself In *David Copperfield*, Dickens refers to his own early days, and we can know something quite substantial about H G. Wells' life from *Love and Mr Lewisham*.

Thus it is with Munshi's *Ver-ni Vasulat*, the first of his four social novels We are told in the opening pages of the book that it owes its existence to certain events and emotions that the author himself saw and felt, and to the desire to give clarity and concreteness to certain striking personalities he had known. It is written in three parts and covers a wide range of matter. The author has that love for this book which a parent has for his first born. Under the title of *Revenge is Mine* it appeared in English a few years after the Gujarati edition was out, thus indicating the appeal that it made to its numerous readers.

The novel follows to a certain extent the old and beaten path of Gujarati fiction. For a time, the story

veers round intrigues in the State of Ratnagarh, describes the domestic life and customs of Hindu families, depicts the life and work of sadhus. But in other respects the story blazes a new trail.

The story begins with the struggles of a young man, Jagatkishore, against dire poverty. Raghubhai, an official of the small state of Ratnagadh, takes the fatherless boy and his mother, Gunavanti, under his protection. Jagat becomes strongly attached to a neighbour's little daughter, Tanman. Gunavanti's beauty proves too much of an attraction for Raghubhai and, with her son, she has to take refuge in the house of her husband's elder brother at Surat to escape dishonour.

Years pass, and Jagat, now a college student, meets his Tanman again, now in the spring-flush of youth and beauty at Dumas, near Surat. The vacation, a dream of happiness, passes all too soon. The young lovers part with tears, and as they kiss, are observed by the stepmother of Tanman. She is indignant; caste rules forbid her marrying Jagat; Tanman is sacrificed at the altar of caste and married to Sheth Karamdas Tribhovandas, a man of vile character. The cruel machinations of her stepmother Gulabbai and the rush tactics of her assistant Shyamdas consummate this event.

Jagat returns home to Surat to find the wicked Raghubhai poisoning with his presence the dying moments of his saintly mother. He vows to avenge himself on Raghubhai.

Tanman is brought to Bombay to lead an unhappy life, cut off from all refined society and company, except what she can get from Rama, daughter of her tenant, Raghubhai, who has also come to Bombay after finding his plans for the Dewanship of Ratnagarh foiled. Rama remains a friend of Tanman to her dying day which comes

soon after. In fact, she has been the only confidante of Tanman in her last days.

Jagatkishore, after he has sustained the loss of the only two people he cared for most—his mother and Tanman—harbours thoughts of suicide. He is saved from it by Anantanand, a Swami of the Math at Varat, and from that day onward Jagatkishore bends his energies to the task of putting the Swami's ashram on a surer foundation. He experiences spiritual rebirth and assumes a new name, Siddhanath. In the course of his activities on behalf of the Math, he finds himself confronted with Raghubhai who is scheming with others to wreck the institution as also the State of Ratnagarh. Thus he finds that the interests of the ashram as well as his own lie in the uprooting of Raghubhai or in causing him to come to grief.

To achieve this end Jagat comes to Bombay, cultivates the friendship of Raghubhai who, hoping to get his daughter Rama married to him, encourages him to meet her. Jagatkishore evinces no objection to this as he wants to give a severe shock to Raghubhai later by refusing to marry Rama, after leading him to expect that he will. He feels that to break the heart of the innocent girl in order to torture her father is just retribution for what his mother had suffered at his hands. But Raghubhai is made of sterner stuff. So self-centred is he that Jagatkishore's refusal breaks the heart not of Raghubhai but of the innocent and trusting Rama.

Between Raghubhai and Anantananda there has never been any love lost and the former has been trying to wreck the latter's schemes. Raghubhai employs Tanman's uncle to steal some important documents from Anantananda's safe. The attempted robbery by Tanman's uncle is frustrated by Jagat. Carried away by his personal wrong, he allows the thief to be murdered by his discarded

mistress, Tanman's stepmother, and he lets her escape Anantanand, who happens to arrive on the scene immediately after the murder, sees Jagatkishore running away. He presumes that Jagatkishore must be the culprit, that in his desire for revenge he must have done the foul deed. To save Jagatkishore and the institution from disgrace, the Swami takes the blame for the murder upon himself, unaware of the fact that the real culprit is not Jagatkishore at all, but Gulabbai, Tanman's stepmother. When Jagatkishore sees Anantanand for the last time before he is hanged, he is told by the Swami to get married and to forget all thoughts of revenge. In very noble language he tells his pupil that revenge comes of its own accord, that there is no vital difference between making others unhappy and being so ourselves,—they are, he reminds him, two halves of a single whole, mutual complements of each other.

With Prospero in *The Tempest*, Jagatkishore might have said: 'Though with their high wrongs I am struck to the quick. Yet with my noble reason 'gainst my fury, Do I take part. The rarer action is in virtue than in vengeance'—so completely is he altered for the better by the parting words of Swami Anantanand. He acts on this advice and deliberately sets out to woo and win Rama, the daughter of Raghubhai, his arch-enemy, who has been pining for him; ultimately he leads her to Ratnagarh as his mate and comrade in the great work of nation-building.

Grim and tragic are the incidents that accompany the forced marriage of Tanman with Karamdas. At the time when her father is either just dead or dying of a paralytic stroke brought on by the agony to which he is subjected by his wife, Gulabbai, the daughter is wedded (to the accompaniment of music) to a libertine. The strain is too great for her to bear, her fragile body and

sensitive mind, weakened by continuous and systematic torture, is unequal to the strain; she who has dedicated her soul to Jagat, she who has been dragged from her loving though ineffectual father's death-bed, faints in the marriage pandal. Equally poignant is the remembrance of the few years she spends at the house of her husband.

The maelstrom of passions which holds the mind of Jagatkishore within its grip infuses in us deep sympathy for the hero and we share his thirst for revenge in spite of ourselves. We hold him in greater respect when, after meeting Anantanand, he undergoes a spiritual reincarnation and issues therefrom as Siddhanath.

The comparatively minor characters like the wicked Gulab and the disreputable Shyamdas, the ignoble Raghubhai and the licentious Karamdas get their deserts in the end. The grim, almost forbidding poignancy of the novel is relieved by such passages as the description of the good work done by the Math at Varat under the direction of Swami Anantanand. This model village is a veritable Utopia where free and compulsory education is given to all from the kindergarten to the college stage; attention is bestowed here both on the mind and the body of the student and he or she is taught to be self-reliant. Anantanand shows to the world how money should be spent. He has heightened, he has glorified, he has ennobled his people and his surroundings.

In *Kono Vank?* (Whose Fault?), Munshi bitterly exposes those social evils and vices which were only casually touched on in *Ver-ni Vasulat*, such as the plight of widows in society, forced marriages and caste restrictions. Here he pours righteous indignation on these and similar social anathemas. The title itself (Whose Fault?) is very significant. Many have to suffer and suffer greatly and grievously—and for all this, whose is the

responsibility, the author pertinently asks. So sincerely did the author believe in the justice of his cause that he decided not to revise the plot or alter it even slightly when it was to be published in book form after it had gained popularity as a serial.

The author's spirit is roused to a furious pitch when he witnesses the evils in society. In the preface he tells us: 'So long as the foundation of society rests on woman's helplessness and dependence and misery, so long as we cannot face the question of marriage squarely and in a natural way, so long as manhood is considered to lie in the maintenance of orthodox and time-worn conventions, even at the cost of self-development, so long as society takes pride in crushing rather than uplifting the pure and noble sentiments of the human heart—these stories will not be considered improper or out of place'.

Within the comparatively small compass of a prologue, an epilogue and the few hundred pages which comprise the four parts of the book, the author very successfully paints for us the characters of two major victims of social cruelty and orthodoxy, not to say injustice. Though the novel is as grim and forbidding as *Ver-ni Vasulat*, indeed, in some places even more so, it is relieved in part by flashes of mocking humour which bring much needed relief to the overworked sentiments of the readers.

Briefly told, the story deals with the life and character of Mani who finds herself a widow at the tender age of eight, a month after her marriage. Some time later, she is sent to slave for her deceased husband's people, where she has to work harder than any factory hand, without one smile of favour, one word of encouragement. Driven to despair, she takes the plunge into freedom. We see her later in the company of her illegitimate daughter, Surekha, going from place to place. She suffers

from the cruelty of man-made laws and taboos, and becomes a plaything in the hands of unscrupulous people, including women of ill-repute like Tungabhadra and a pseudo-saint who claims to be a yogi. She escapes from their coils and finds temporary shelter in the garret of a young law-student, Muchkund.

Muchkund offers to help Mani and proposes marriage. But his father and friends will not hear of it and he is reduced to submission and forced to marry an illiterate, quarrelsome, spiteful, country cousin in the person of Kashi, who makes his life unhappy and leaves him when he is seriously ill. Despite pain, personal hardship and insults; even the death of her only and dearly loved daughter Surekha, Mani spends her mental and physical resources, her small and precarious income, comes very near selling her honour, and finally loses her child to save the life of the man who had helped her in her hour of need. Such gratitude, such sacrifice, such self-effacement, such undivided loyalty are rare, and Mani rises infinitely in our esteem. She counsels Muchkund to stay with his wife Kashi and does not accept the alternative suggestion put forward by Muchkund. It is only after Kashi dies some years later that Mani marries Muchkund and gets the reward which her ungrudging services so richly deserved.

All through the story, the author's abhorrence of the social evils he is exposing is powerfully conveyed. When Mani, a child, is told that her husband is dead, she asks innocently. "Yes, but what is that to me?" Such child marriages and the consequent ill-treatment of poor little widows rouses not only our sympathy, but also our indignation.

According to Virginia Woolf, 'Fiction must stick to facts and the truer the facts, the better the fiction. Fiction is like a spider's web, attached ever so slightly perhaps

but still attached to life at all four corners.' Judged from this standpoint, Munshi's novels fulfil the requirement completely. For the plot of the novel, he evidently looked round him and put his observations down on paper; so true is his reflection of life in letters. Anyone who knows anything about life will readily agree with the theme of the novel. The sufferings of Mani do not at any time seem to be artificially intensified or exaggerated to any degree. And through all these sufferings, Mani emerges purified of any dross she may have possessed at the outset. One is tempted to apply to her the words Thomas Hardy wrote about Tess of the D'Urbervilles: 'A pure woman'. It is Mani who asks her one-time seducer Gambhirlal to marry her, it is she who insists upon Kashi's recall; her escape from Tungabhadra's house of ill-fame is another of her merits; it is her unremitting service and sacrifice that bring Muchkund back to life and happiness; she is not only a pure woman, but a noble figure, good in herself and the cause of goodness in others such as Gambhirlal, Chandulal and even Pranshankar.

Mani's love for Muchkund is deep, sincere, lasting. Long before they are married in the flesh, the marriage of their minds has taken place. Their love is true and so it does not alter 'when it alteration finds'; the path of their love does not run smooth for quite some time and yet she never hesitates, never doubts, but goes bravely on.

As the author admits in his preface, there appear to be some shortcomings in the novel, but the discrepancies are not of any great consequence. For instance, we are told in one place that Kashi, Muchkund's first wife, is illiterate and has to call in a neighbour to read a letter; she is described a few pages later as *writing* a letter to her parents mentioning in detail all her hardships. Muchkund is told in one place by Mani herself that she was a child-widow.

and yet he is shocked when he hears it from her again a little later.

Chance and coincidence also stretch their arms a little too far, Rao Saheb Gambhirlal who was the cause of Mani's downfall appears in succession as the Mamlatdar of Mithakuva, and the President of the Samaj Uddharni Sabha, it is to his house that Mani is taken when a constitutional question arises; he is in Bombay some time later when Mani is also in the city; he is present at Tungabhadra's when Mani goes there for a loan. It is also remarkable that Chandulal should be Muchkund's employer, his father's friend, Mani's caller at Tungabhadra's, Mani Karnika's brother-in-law, and Inspector of the School where Mani is a teacher. The characters seem to do just what is expected of them and are found, more often than not, where they are least expected but most wanted. It is a little sad to find the pseudo 'yogi' basking in the sunshine of happiness, as he apparently seems to be doing, at the end of the book; it is also surprising to see Mani forget the duration of her married life and say to the yogi that it was three months when we are told earlier that it was only a month.

But these are minor shortcomings. In a work of such magnitude it is possible for such details to be overlooked. Besides, they do not strike the reader on casual perusal of the book. And then, one is more than abundantly recompensed by the merits of the book, including its mocking humour.

Pranshankar Pandya, Muchkund's father, with his unique combination of Sanskrit-cum-Gujarati, becomes a laughable figure reminiscent of Bhadrambhadrā; the ways and means adopted by Dr Dhaneshchandra and Pleader Maruti for self-advertisement and the scene at the Kashtanashteshwar temple at night are among the many humorous

situations in the book. But the humour here is far from light. It seems as if the author dipped his pen in gall before writing these pages; there is such a strain of cynicism running through them.

Social tyranny and injustice receive at Munshi's hands a well-deserved and sharp rebuke. *Kono Vank* serves as an eye-opener. As Munshi tells us, there are innumerable Manis and Muchkunds in this world who live and die like dumb-driven cattle, thanks to the blind apathy of our society and its customs; their whole life is blighted by the fret and fever of their world. And who is ultimately responsible for this dire cruelty? In *Ver-ni Vasulat*, Tanman was forced to marry Karamdas against her wishes and in preference to a better man; here Muchkund is compelled to wed the spiteful Kashi.

In *Svapnadrishta*, (The Visionary), Munshi gives an impression of the political life of India during the first decade of the present century. Those were the days of the partition of Bengal—*Bang-Bhanga*—the Swadeshi and Boycott movement when the feelings of Indians had risen to a high pitch and people had become politically conscious. The author seems to recall vividly his own life during those stormy days when he was a student of the Baroda College in this, his first attempt to weave contemporary political events into his writing.

Sudarshana, the hero, has been fed on visions from his birth and this has stimulated his latent political fervour. The books that he has read, the sights he has seen, all heighten this urge. When as an undergraduate at the Baroda college he sees and hears his professor Aurobindo Ghosh, he feels that the time has arrived when he should put his ideas into practice. 'Mother' India beckons to him and asks him to find her lord and master. He thereupon gets together his friends and formulates various plans for

the attainment of freedom and independence for his country within a measurable time. So sanguine is he in his outlook and so obsessed by his vision of a free India that he has no place for women in his life. He therefore disregards his parents' choice, Sulochana, just as she discards him, for she too is a smart college student of Bombay and does not much care for 'simpletons' like him, who go about shabbily, even uncleanly, dressed and have no place in their hearts for love.

In the company of his friends like Keshasp, Mohanlal Parekh and Ambalal Desai, Sudarshana attends the Surat session of the Indian National Congress held in December 1907 and witnesses for himself the pandemonium that reigned there, the arguments and efforts of the two parties—the *Jehal* and the *Maval* under Tilak and Sir Pheroze-shah Mehta respectively—to arrive at a compromise and the meeting under the presidentship of Dr. Rash Behari Ghose. He feels that the day of deliverance has at last arrived, that the dawn is about to break. Even the words of Prof. Kapadia who tries to damp his enthusiasm by pointing out that all his seeds have fallen on barren soil and that his friends are broken reeds do little to cool his ardour.

On the 31st of January of the following year a meeting is to be held of those 'friends' and a plan of action is to be formulated. Shortly before the day comes, Sudarshana sees these ardent 'patriots' fall back from the positions they had taken up; some sell their fervour for 'a mess of pottage', others refer to 'difficulties' and so, on the fateful day, Sudarshana finds himself alone—'majestic, though in ruin'. The iron enters his soul and the scales fall from his eyes. Prof Kapadia was right after all. They are all, himself included, he now sees, just children politically, foolish and immature. In this state of utter disillusionment he takes his 'plans', the fruit of untold

labour and pain, the result of many a sleepless day and night, the children of his flowering intelligence—all that remains now of his 'Secret Society' and of its 'unflinching' resolve to attain independence—and applies a match to them'

Later, Sudarshana acquiesces in his father's wishes, qualifies for the bar and settles down presumably to an uneventful life. The story is attractive both in its conception and execution. Like an epic it opens *in medias res* and the description of the early years that went to the formulation of the visionary in Sudarshana is indeed superb, as also is the command given by Mother India to the young undergraduate. It is reminiscent of the thirty-fifth 'song-offering' in the *Gitanjali*, beginning with 'Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high'.

The description of the Baroda College, of the prominent persons of the time, of authentic historic incidents of the day, invest the book with a high documentary value. The humour in this book is also of a high order! How delightful it is to be introduced to the worldly-wise but proverbially absent-minded Prof Kapadia—surrounded by a welter of volumes—who drew knowledge from books as lungs breathe in air! How naive is the quixotry of Girja-shanker Shukla! The conversation which Naranbhai holds in the train between himself and his conscience before seeking an interview with the Hon Mr Jagmohanlal; the spectacle of Sheth Mabhai 'Landlord and Big-leaf-dish and cup Merchant' fawning upon Mr. Smith—all these may have their tragic aspects, but the mordant humour with which they are drawn is irresistible.

And, above all, overshadowing every hill and dale, stands the figure of Sudarshana 'deep on whose front engraven deliberation sat'. Like Milton he feels he is born to achieve great things, to be the protector of *gobrahman*,

to be the defender of his country's greatness and glory. If he is able to do little and achieve even less, the fault seems to lie, to a great extent, elsewhere and on other shoulders. We share in his grief and become partners of his disillusionment when towards the end, his eyes are opened to the stark realities of the materialistic world. We may be tempted to pity him, to disagree with him, but never to blame him—so thoroughly does he become part of ourselves.

Sneha Sambhrama (Bewilderment of Love), a part of which was dramatised as *Pidagrast Professor*, reveals Munshi in a rollicking, boisterous mood. An extremely impressionable professor is very fond of many fair admirers, among them the wife of Shamshere Bahadur Jorwarsingh, who enjoys a bubble reputation founded on his boastful talk. This leads to unexpected developments. The wife of the professor is disgusted with the silly sentimentality of her husband, while the wife of Shamshere Bahadur is so disgusted with her husband's vain bragging that she is willing to run away with the professor.

The tangled skein is unravelled one night at a lonely house to which the whole party is made to repair by a practical joke played by mutual friends. The denouement is full of bright sparkling comedy. Shamshere Bahadur is shown up as a craven-hearted braggart and his wife, out of sheer pity, decides to stick to him letting down the professor with whom she was going to elope. At the end, the disillusioned professor—now the laughing stock of his fair admirers—confesses to his wife and his beloved pupil, Mohini: "I have been an ass. Please forgive me." In reply, an old friend coolly offers him his snuff-box, saying "Never mind, dear boy, take a pinch of this. It will clear your head."

Every page of this delightful book is replete with humour. The characterisation is true to life. The innocent professor, his wife, loving but uncouth, the bold girl Mohini, the genial old uncle and the good old aunt, Jaskore, and above all, the braggart Shamshere Bahadur are all real people as human as ourselves in their failings and foibles, their little virtues and petty vices, familiar types whom we meet in our lives every day and Munshi has drawn them so that they all but breathe—with the philosopher's slightly cynical touch which puts salt into the wit.

The latest social novel of the author, *Tapasvini*, which takes up the thread of social and political life as described in *Svapnadrasta* is dealt with in a later chapter.

As a social novelist, Munshi has contributed largely and generously to the pleasure and betterment of our society. He has touched on social foibles with the pen and the zest of a reformer—salted with shafts of appropriate humour. The political condition of his country, some four decades ago, he has observed with an unerring eye. The moral tone of his writings has been uniformly high and uplifting. Good triumphs over Evil, and the reader is asked to harbour no thoughts of revenge for the wrongs which are inflicted on him for ‘the rarer action is in Virtue than in Vengeance.’

In the field of the short story, Munshi has contributed one volume comprising some twenty stories, entitled *Mari Kamla ane Biji Vato* (1924). These stories cover a sufficiently wide range of matter and style extending from what might be described as parody to real first-rate narrative. There is no dull uniformity about them, varied as they are by different themes, sentiments and forms of expression. The thread of a common purpose—that of laying bare the crudities and foibles of social and domestic

life with a view to reforming them—runs through them all.

Shamalshano Vivaha, Gomatidadanun Gaurava, Shakuntala ane Durvasa, Khangi Karbhari—are easily the best of the collection, and to some extent typical of the contents of the book. The first story is a satire on unequal marriages wherein a fifty-two-year old bridegroom sets out to wed his fifth wife, a girl of five. The second story exposes the fact that some families take pride on supposed facts which if and when known would certainly alter that attitude to a considerable extent. The element of surprise in this story is indeed refreshing. The treatment that modern educated women mete out to the senior members of their husband's family, the scant sympathy and courtesy they show to those who deserve infinitely better treatment, their infatuation for one another, and the consequent neglect of their own children is the theme of the third story. It is vivid and touching and succeeds in driving home the moral lesson.

The fourth—*Khangi Karbhari*—is again a humorous satire, appropriately wound up with an unexpected denouement on the ‘busy’ men who entrust everything, even correspondence with their wives, to their Private Secretary, and live aloof from their hearths and homes. *Ek Patra* is the heart-rending narration of an ‘unfortunate’ sixteen-year old maiden who, in this her letter, lays bare her soul without any reserve. She accuses her husband of lack of charity and goes on to relate to him how her life was devoid of any experience of justice, tolerance, even affection and happiness. This sad account brings vividly before the reader what is undeniably the condition of many a married woman. *Navi Ankhe Juna Tamasha*, is a pure fantasy and may shock the traditionalists by virtue of its unorthodox treatment of revered mythological and historical persons. The reader has only to

remember that it is a dream after all and hence it need not be taken so seriously.

How the memory of an ill-done or undone act may obsess the person concerned even to delirious fever is the subject of *Smarandeshni Sundari*. *Kandu Akhyan* and *Stri Samshodhak Mandal no Varshik Samarambh* are both light parodies and help to while away an hour in innocent merriment.

Social customs which blind people to the innate good of others as well as their own and thus help to keep alive contemptible and out-moded conventions are exposed here —inter-mingled with a fair amount of humour and pathos to suit the need of the particular story. Thus these stories serve a double purpose. They help to pave the way to a better state of social life and also assist in the passing of an idle day by crowding it with merriment and laughter.

Literature, we are told, is conscious contact with environment, and Munshi's fiction proves indisputably the justice of the remark. Life is the data, the raw material from which he makes the marbles of his novels and stories. They are, therefore, like life, many-sided, and, like it again, very interesting and thought-provoking. If Munshi is great as a social dramatist, he is greater as a writer of social fiction!

Munshi's genius is analytic; his wit is mingled with wisdom. He pens his fiction with an eye to facts, and hence, it has a serious purpose 'To show something that is wrong but not conceded to be such, to throw some light upon it and even by exaggeration, if need be, to compel people to see that which they are unable to or unwilling to see'—this is the aim of his writings Reforming by ridicule is his *forte*, if not his sole objective

CHAPTER IV

HISTORICAL ROMANCES I

HISTORICAL fiction has always been immensely popular because it combines happily and harmoniously the two illusions of reality and unreality. ‘Historical fiction,’ observes Alfred T. Sheppard in his *The Art and Practice of Historical Fiction*, ‘deals imaginatively with the past and can follow paths where Trespass Boards confront the pedestrian historian. The novelist has wider range, he may set foot in the reserves of history, but on one condition; he may not make his habitation there, or may only build if part of his house stands within the demesne of the imagination. The really great historical novelists, it seems to me, are those who invest and surround their characters—the men and women of ‘lost years’—with the haze of wistfulness and glamour which is comparable to that gloss of film of pre-historic implements and weapons, which covers time’s own work, not to be copied by any human tool or process.’

A successful historical novelist is he who takes certain events and characters of history and weaves around them a fictitious enchantment. He reconstructs imaginatively the life of the past, permitting neither historical facts to impede his fiction, nor his fiction to violate the significance of historical facts. Renowned among such writers of historical romances and novels are Dumas, Hugo, Scott, and Bulwer Lytton. In our day, Jacob Wassermann in his *The Triumph of Youth*, and Leon Feuchtwanger in his *Jew Suss* have kept burning the torch of the historical novel. To the ranks of such writers, Munshi belongs.

Munshi's historical novels have exercised the same spell over Gujarat as did the *Waverly Novels* of Walter Scott over England. They embody the eternal elements of the history of Gujarat, and have been tremendously popular.

To Munshi, history is not a mere pageant of the past; nor is it a chronological catalogue of the rise and fall of kings and dynasties. It is a human document. His poetic imagination infuses life and vitality into the dry bones of history. Among the stones and ruins of Patan and Awanti, he discovers an elevating wisdom and an undying faith in Aryan culture. He presents in a most remarkable manner the imaginative reconstruction of the age of Munja, Siddharaja Jayasinha and Karna Vaghela.

While Munshi has before him the wider vision of Aryan Culture, in his novels on Gujarat he lays bare the soul of Gujarat as he sees it.

With a song in their hearts and a prophetic light in their souls, Munshi's heroes and heroines revitalise the nation and guide the people through one spiritual crisis after another. This is Munshi's interpretation of history and it forms the very foundation on which the superstructure of his historical romances is reared.

In re-creating the long dead past and investing it with the appeal of living reality, Munshi is a wizard. His romances are lit by that distinguishing quality of the romantic art, the renaissance of wonder. But we are not in a dream-world. From Awanti to Patan, and from Patan to Junagadh, we are carried along through the royal courts, streets and homes, in complete intimacy with living figures of history.

As a story-teller, Munshi is incomparable. He is never dull or heavy. The broad stream of his narrative flows vigorously and we are simply borne on it. There is no

pause, there is no weariness. With him we no longer read a story, we live it. Such is the compelling power of his vision that by 'the willing suspension of disbelief' we share in his delight, wisdom and abounding sympathy. While we read his romances, the joys, sorrows and passions of the characters become part of our own emotional experience.

History becomes in Munshi's hand an interpretation of life because he brings to his romances the poetry of existence. The range and variety of his characters is vast. While he deals with kings and king-makers, he grapples with fundamental passions. The eternal human heart is what intrinsically interests him. His vision is profound. His creative intuition penetrates into the permanent springs of human action.

Love is one of the fundamental passions of life. In its consummation, the very purpose of existence is fulfilled. It sustains and transfigures life and moulds destiny. All Munshi's characters, infinitely fascinating as they are, rise and fall, live and die by it. It is love which makes his characters such as Munja, Munjal, Siddharaja, Minal, Manjari and Prasanna, 'the very raw material of a divinity'.

Such living characters can never be conceived and created in the objective aloofness of an impersonal art. They demand the very life-blood of the creative passion of the author. There is something positive of Munshi's personality in the dignity, nobility, power, strength and passion for beauty with which he imbues these characters. Munshi has the courage of a great artist to follow his vision of depicting the inner life of the soul. He naturally loathes the conventional codes of commonplace art. He detests sentimentalism and sham romanticism which give a false view of life. His humour is sharp, penetrating and free from malice. It ranges from a smile to a hearty

laugh. Sparkling and humane, it reflects his firm grip on life.

What makes his characters so unmistakably real is their unfailing humanity. Munja, Munjal, Minal and Manjari are colossal beings, but they are essentially true to life. Because they are intensely human, they are often baffling, unpredictable and mysterious.

In Munshi's romances, there are no villains. Sheer evil, like disease, does not interest him. His healthy curiosity and wide sympathy allow unfettered freedom to his characters. They live with a vivid intensity. While their conflicts on the physical plane are described in dramatic situations, their inner restlessness, anguish and conflicts are delineated with a *finesse* that reveals the author's deep insight into life and his profound spiritual experiences. Munshi shows an unrivalled knowledge of the most subtle and complex working of the feminine heart. In the portrayal of Minal and Manjari, his creative art approaches its high-water-mark. There is a complete harmony of action and character in his novels.

There is a sense of largeness in Munshi's romances. The plots and sub-plots are firmly woven into coherent whole. There is no padding. The structural dimension, design, proportion and harmony make them impressive. In all his romances, there is a unity of impression which is admirable. And his art is essentially sensuous, and evokes the participation of the readers' senses. Lyrical beauty, word-painting, wealth of felicitous imagery and luminous atmosphere characterise his prose. Fine in texture, vigorous in movement and lucid in expression, his prose has flexibility and variety enough to depict the full gamut of human nature.

CHAPTER V

HISTORICAL ROMANCES II

THE publication of *Patan-ni-Prabhuta* in 1916 marked not only a turning point in Munshi's literary career but also a landmark in Gujarati literature. The book roused a storm of protest from the Jains. It is the first of a great trilogy, the other two being *Gujarat-no Nath* and *Rajadhura*. This trilogy deals with the most glorious period of Hindu Gujarat, the reign of Siddharaja Jayasinha. We can clearly trace in these novels the growth of Munshi as a novelist. He goes from strength to strength in the first two and in the third, we recognise the hand of the master.

The plot of the first novel revolves round the years when Munjal Mehta, the minister, consolidates the power of Anahilavad Patan during the minority of Jayasinha Chaulukya who later came to be known as Siddharaja. Inspired by a love for Patan, Munjal puts an end to internal strife, introduces a strong government and annexes Lata and Sorath to Gujarat. His love for the dowager queen, Minaldevi, reciprocated and yet held within stern bounds, furnishes the romance in the first of the three novels.

The second and the third novels carry the story forward. They are dominated by the brilliant Manjari, the daughter of a Kashmiri Pandit, who is saved from being initiated as a Jain nun by the heroic Kak, a soldier of fortune. She eludes the persecutions of Uda Mehta, the powerful governor of Khambat; at first, scorns the attentions of Kak, wedded husband though he is, and ends by being his devoted wife; and finally dies defending the fort of Bhrigukachha. The last volume closes with the

triumphal procession of Jayadeva as the Rajadhiraja of Gujarat through the streets of Bhrigukachha supported by Munjal, Kak and other important ministers

These three works, which depict Hindu Gujarat at its best, have made a strong appeal to the people of Gujarat who, till they appeared, lacked consciousness of their heroic heritage. Some of the characters, which were mere names before, have now found a proud and permanent place in the popular imagination. The galaxy of great figures is a priceless ornament to modern Gujarati fiction.

Through all the three works, Munjal stands out in solitary splendour like some tall peak towering over a range. His eye is everywhere, his hand is ever prompt to intervene at every crisis. Indeed, he is the very spirit of Gujarat incarnate. No sacrifice is too great for him if his country demands it. He never swerves from his loyalty. He has mastered his passions and, in this mastery of himself, he stands above all others. For Minaldevi, his love is deep and true as steel, but pure as the love of a devotee for his Goddess. Munjal is a great study in human psychology.

Much of the power and appeal of Munshi's writing in this trilogy derive from his consummate knowledge and understanding of the working of the feminine mind in every mood and action. Minaldevi, in the first work, is almost repellent in her blind and stiff-necked pride. Experience mellows her, and she changes into the stately mother of her people. She can even be generous to Ranak-devi who preferred the Ra of Junagadh to her own son.

Manjari is a different type of woman altogether. She is highly intellectual, deeply versed in the intricacies of Sanskrit learning. Her ideal has been the great Brahman warrior, Parashurama, and she looks with lofty disdain upon the puny men of her time. When Kak first comes

to her notice, she has nothing but contempt for this vagabond trooper who knows no word of Sanskrit.

Kak however sets out to win her, and when he shows his gallantry and martial prowess, she flings her pride away, and gives herself to him body and soul. Manjari is a woman in a million. Her tragic death at the end of the third volume leaves the reader with tears in his eyes.

Her lover, Kak, is best described as an overgrown boy in his love of adventure and fighting. But he also has a diplomat's wisdom. Loyal to the core, Kak is the soul of honour and has the courage to oppose his King when he is in the wrong. He is a figure to love. He will be to the boys of Gujarat what Richard the Lion-hearted has been to the youth of England.

Apart from the strong and heroic characterisation, Munshi's literary expression in this trilogy reaches a very high level of excellence. He is a painter with a large canvas, an unerring brush and a breathless manner. He delights in sharp contrasts, juxtaposing the comic and the tragic, the sublime and the ludicrous, the strange and the familiar, the beautiful and the bizarre. These three works contain chapters which move and thrill and haunt in a way which is only possible with great literature. This saga of Gujarat is absorbing throughout in its interest, full of speed and action, of glorious adventure and tense emotion and of the things which thrill both young and old.

Patan-ni Prabhuta

The novel opens with Karnadeva, the King of Anahilavad Patan, on his death-bed. The atmosphere of the palace is reeking with intrigue and power-politics. The Jains, who had played a decisive role in the political and social life of Gujarat, are busy scheming for a further

consolidation of their power and of their hold on the Royal House of Patan. They have long dreamt of converting the kingdom of Patan into a Jain State, and now in the last illness of their sovereign, they see an opportunity of fulfilling that dream. The Rajput chiefs, who had been brought under the suzerainty of Patan by Prime Minister Munjal, are apprehensive about the aggressive designs of the Jains and are quite prepared to measure swords with them in the event of Karnadeva's death.

Thirteen years previously, Minaldevi, the Princess of Chandrayati, attracted by the magnetic personality of Munjal, had come all the way to Patan from the South to marry Karnadeva. Her heart had been drawn to Munjal. To be near him and to be merged in him was the longing which motivated her marriage to Karnadeva. The marriage was a failure. Their son, Jayadeva, the Crown Prince, is too young to take over the reins of state when the King dies.

But, all these years, Minaldevi had been a puppet Queen and had nourished dreams of wielding unbridled power. Now, she feels that the stage can be set for realising her ambition. 'Munjal is the main hurdle. His appeasing policy will lead me nowhere,' she argues with herself.

At this psychological moment, Anandsuri, a Jain *saddhu*, imbued with the passion of spreading Jainism as a State-religion in Gujarat, arrives and Minaldevi succumbs to his soft whisperings. Anandsuri is a remarkable person combining diplomacy with priestcraft. He quickly ingratiates himself into Minaldevi's favour.

Against this background, pregnant with conflicts, stands the outstanding figure of Munjal. He is a ballast to the ship of state. He is not a mere Prime Minister; he is the soul of the kingdom of Patan. He is a master builder, in whose genius, wisdom and self-denial, the people

of Patan have their abiding source of courage and faith; in short, he is the custodian of the honour of Patan.

Munjal is too astute to be taken in by the wily Anandsuri and he sizes him up at the very first meeting. But he plays the game and gives Anandsuri a long-enough rope to get enmeshed in his own craftiness.

To oust Munjal from power is the cherished desire of Anandsuri. If only Minaldevi joins him, Anandsuri will resort to Machiavellian tactics and unfurl the sacred flag of Lord Mahavir in all Gujarat. Incidentally, Minaldevi will also realise her dream of wielding absolute power and authority. Anandsuri's fanatical ardour is reminiscent of a mediaeval Jesuit.

Anandsuri launches himself on his self-ordained mission.

"What would you do if you were the Prime Minister of Patan?" Minal asks.

"Jainism will be my cardinal policy. I will lead Patan from victory to victory and hoist the flag of Lord Mahavir in all parts of the country." Anandsuri then impresses on her the importance of fanaticism in politics.

"How strange! You echo my thoughts. Suppose the Jains prove too powerful and Patan becomes another Chandravati?" Minal questions.

"May be, Queen, there is a way out of it. But first remove him," Anandsuri boldly strikes.

"Whom? Munjal? My sole support and strength all these thirteen years?" Minal looks bewildered

"A servant, however loyal, is apt to be conservative. He cannot have the vision of the sovereign. Munjal can be shunted away to Chandravati to deal with the Jains." Anandsuri unfolds his game.

Devaprasad, Karnadeva's step brother and principal feudal chief, comes to pay his last respects to the dying

Karnadeva. He relates to his son, Tribhuvan, the tragic story of his marriage with Hansa, a sister of Munjal, and tells him how mysteriously she was taken away from him and has been confined in Patan all these years by Minaldevi with the help of Munjal. The young Tribhuvan goes to Munjal to secure his mother's freedom and appeals to him piteously but in vain. Munjal's sense of duty demands this sacrifice and he is big enough to make it.

Karnadeva dies and the floodgates of disruptive forces are opened. Munjal is in a fix. His constructive leadership desires a peaceful consolidation of the people. For a moment, his mind is assailed by distressing thoughts: how he sacrificed his dear wife, son, sister and relations and sublimated all personal desires and ambitions for the good of the state; and now, Minal was striking at the root of his policy. Should he revolt, capture Patan and imprison her?

The plan conceived by Anandsuri is put through to the wonder and dismay of the people of Patan. The blow is struck against Munjal. Minal throws off the tutelage of Munjal and he is sent off to fight the king of Malva! The plan to arrest Devaprasad in Patan miscarries as he escapes and meets Munjal outside Patan. This disturbs Minal, but each obstacle or opposition reveals something heroic in her nature, and she determines to pursue her path with unremitting vigour. Hansa is suddenly released and is asked to prevail upon her husband, Devaprasad, to hold up his march on Patan! In a fray with Jayadeva, Hansa's son, Tribhuvan, is wounded and is about to be killed by some soldiers. Minal promises to let Tribhuvan live only if his mother fulfils her wish. Hansa agrees. The mother and son meet. But Minal is impatient of Hansa's maternal sentiments. She has to accept Minal's mandate. Leaving Tribhuvan to the care of Prasanna, she goes out,

as directed by Minal, to meet her husband, whom she has not seen for years.

Devaprasad is thinking of joining hands with Munjal and then marching to Patan to settle with Minal. But, as arranged by Minal, Hansa goes and meets Devaprasad. A sudden upsurge of love floods them. "What do I care for the world and its prizes? Your lap is my world and I have regained it," cries Devaprasad. So, the plans of the march are delayed. Minal thus wins a tactical victory.

Minal, with Anandsuri, leaves Patan for Chandravati to obtain full support for her cause. On the way, they meet Munjal. Minal is raging with anger and upbraids him in harsh and biting words. But the imperturbable Munjal replies: "Forgetting is not one of my habits. I moulded you and raised you to the dignity of a Queen. Now you seem to have turned into a fury, destined to destroy the House of Solankis! And to me you are a faithless, heartless, cruel....." In lofty contempt, he throws his weapons to the ground and becomes a willing prisoner of Minal and Anandsuri. It looks as though Minal has scored another victory.

Patan is without its master and the nation's authentic voice is hushed for a while. People are indignant at Minal's doings and organize themselves to fight her when she returns. Tribhuwan and Prasanna, their romance well advanced, stir them to a sudden flood of mutiny. In the eyes of the people, the prestige of Patan has been brought to nought by Minal and her aggressive ally.

Anandsuri hatches a diabolical plot. In a cold-blooded manner, he sets fire to the palace where Devaprasad and Hansa are sleeping. Engulfed in the wild fire, they jump from the terrace into the river below. The fanatic *sadhu* pursues them lest they survive. In a hard struggle, the exhausted Devaprasad, with Hansa already dead and kept

on one arm, goes down! Anandsuri exults in joyous relief, "The enemy of Lord Mahavir has at last gone!"

Stunned by the tragic news of the death of his parents, Tribhuvan swears to avenge their death. The people of Patan are enraged that their queen-mother should have even connived at such a heinous crime.

Minal returns to Patan and camps outside the Champaner Gate. Morarpal brings first hand news of the popular rising and tells her that Tribhuvan is the master of Patan. Minal devises an artful plan to overcome the crisis. She sends for Prasanna and with her consummate tact and persuasion, urges her to influence her lover, Tribhuvan, for a settlement. Minal plays dexterously upon the whole gamut of emotions in persuading Prasanna. But Prasanna proves too difficult for her. "Send the prince, Jayadeva, with me and you may retire to the banks of the Narmada," Prasanna speaks plainly to her. In a frenzy of resentment, Minal retorts: "Impertinent girl! Remember, Minaldevi *will* enter Patan as the Royal Mother. If not, after me the deluge Hell to Patan, then!"

Realising that Prasanna cannot be influenced or used for her ends, Minal returns crest-fallen. She has seen the fiery cross of revolt blazing on the horizon. Her tremendous ego receives a shattering blow. How to retrieve the situation? How to regain the lost prestige? She turns the searchlight inwards and indulges in soul-searing introspection. She realises that intoxicated by lust of power, she has gone too far in her mad adventure. It dawns on her that the well-being of Patan is inextricably bound up with Munjal. Sixteen years' rich romantic past is reborn. Her bleeding heart is now crying for Munjal.

Then follows a scene which is the finest piece of art in this book. Munjal comes with the same authentic marks of greatness. Minal breaks into a passionate appeal for

forgiveness for all that had happened. Her confession is transparent. Her surrender is total. "You have been a mirror to the hopes of the people. . To-day you stand vindicated. I have miserably failed. I realise that mere possession of power is a vain dream. I am prepared to abdicate everything. I plead only for the crown for my son. Lead me again, O Munjal!" She pours out her heart prayerfully.

"I have given up this business of leadership," Munjal replies sternly.

But, her pathetic appeal storms the heart of Munjal, whose characteristic magnanimity soon overpowers him. In a few moments, far above the mortal plane, both Munjal and Minal stand resplendent in the glory of Love. "I am the same Munjal, unchanged." Munjal's eloquent words fill her heart and their spontaneous embrace expresses the undying unity of spirits.

Minal is now a changed woman. She resolves to live or die for Patan. Anandsuri is dismissed from office though he continues to nourish his fantastic dream! Munjal goes to Patan and wins over the rebellious but patriotic people. Prasanna tells Tribhuvan that his vow is amply fulfilled. They marry and dedicate themselves to the greatness of Patan.

Minal is now the mother of the State.

In his hour of triumph, a strange weariness comes over Munjal and, as an escape, he desires to go on pilgrimage. Minal clings to him and pleads, "My Munjal, no price is too high and no punishment too severe if only we are *together!*" Minal impresses on him that he should not run away from his duty; that Patan will be orphaned if he laid down the reins of power at such a crucial time. Gujarat needs him and Minal too. Destiny is beckoning to them.

A new hope and joy dawns upon Patan. Amidst the thundering cries of "Jaya Somnath", Jayadeva ascends the throne. Tribhuvan becomes the Lord Protector. It is the task of Munjal to vitalize the country, awaken its will, canalise its energies and inspire its political thinking with a new exalted passion. He emerges as the architect of resurgent Gujarat.

Gujarat-no Nath

Four years have passed. Jayadeva, the young sovereign, is still a novice in statecraft. Tribhuvan, the Lord Protector, is away in Latadesha. Munjal and Minal have gone on a pilgrimage.

The old minister Shantu Mehta is in lone charge of Patan. Suddenly, Ubak, the general of Malva invades Patan and Shantu Mehta, acting on the maxim that discretion is the better part of valour, sues for peace. But before the peace terms are finalised, Kak, a devoted friend of Tribhuvan, appears on the scene and shares the general feeling of resentment in Patan against an ignominious peace. Munjal, too, returns and advises Jayadeva to play a dexterous game.

Kak is a fearless and intrepid Brahman warrior of Lata. He is the hero of many hair-raising adventures. He has also a shrewd and vigorous intellect and a charm which is disarming. He advises Jayadeva to instruct Tribhuvan to stem the invading march of Ra Navaghan of Sorath. Jayadeva repeats Kak's suggestion to Munjal, who admiringly tells him, "Yes, I feel that you have stolen my thoughts" Jayadeva replies, "After all, I am your pupil!"

Kak meets Munjal and is struck with the infinite subtlety of his mind and thought. Munjal impresses on him that a settlement with Malva would mean the thin end of the wedge and that Patan would become a vassal state.

Kak is commissioned to proceed to Khambhat to ascertain whether it would stand loyal. It is the stronghold of the Jains and Minister Uda Mehta is its virtual ruler. Once Uda had carried on an intrigue to replace Munjal; having failed in his aim, he kept on feeding the dissenting factions and under the guise of being a patron of Jainism, had been extending the sphere of his power and influence. As a measure of foresight, therefore, Munjal had removed him from the governorship of Karnavati and posted him to Khambhat, where also his actions had been of doubtful loyalty.

When Kak enters Khambhat, he learns of the persecution of non-Jains and Muslims by Jains in the city. Kak has come to study the situation relating to the fighting strength of the army and its morale. However he has a nose for adventure, though he is the guest of the governor. An old man meets him and implores him to intervene in the *diksha*, the forcible renunciation of life, which was being forced on his son by Jain *sadhus* with the help of Uda. Kak rushes to rescue him but finding that the boy is genuine in his desire to take *diksha*, gives up his effort to dissuade him.

Hardly out of this, Kak finds himself in another adventure. He learns that Manjari, the daughter of the famous poet Rudradutt Vachaspati—who had migrated to Patan from Kashmir and had died two years ago—is being coerced into marriage with Uda against her will by her mother. To Manjari who is a *pundita* in her own right, such a marriage was unthinkable, and she argues with her mother in a spirited manner against it but the mother threatens her that she must choose between marriage and *diksha*!

Kak, with D'Artagnan's boldness, enters the prison where Uda had kept Manjari and liberates her and takes

her away to Karnavati at midnight. Manjari finds herself in a strange situation. She is highly sensitive and fastidious. Her fine aesthetic susceptibilities are repelled by Kak who seems to her crude, coarse, dull and uninspiring. Although she owed her liberation to his efforts, she is too proud even to talk to him. But Manjari's beauty is ravishing. Contact with her highly cultivated mind is a unique experience for Kak, and he feels that he is in the seventh heaven.

In this mood, they reach Karnavati. There, Kak is told that Tribhuvan with his army has gone towards Panchaleshwar to face Ra Navaghan. He rushes to Panchaleshwar and meets Tribhuvan. In a fierce battle, Navaghan is routed and taken prisoner.

This resounding victory of the forces of Patan serves as a counterblast to the ignominious settlement with Malva. Ubak, the general of Malva, however, makes a triumphant entry into Patan and attends the royal court. He has brought a proposal from his master that the Royal Houses of Patan and Avanti should be united by the marriage of Jayadeva with the Princess of Malva. The people of Patan know that settlement with Malva on Ubak's terms is defeat.

But nothing is impossible for the astute Munjal. 'Patan is my child'—he reflects, and on its growth and greatness, all the great gifts of his mind and heart are concentrated. Mināl, the Queen Mother, is now one with him in this aim. Their dynamic spiritual unity has forged a will which can surmount all obstacles and break any resistance that may come in the path of Jayadeva.

But the young king is straining at the leash and often asks himself: "When shall I become a real king? I am just an ornamental figure-head. The power lies in the hands of Munjal. I am not a free agent. I dream of conquering

the whole of Bharat. I want to rule and not merely to reign." He vehemently tells his mother: "I am tired of my helplessness. I want to fly the flag of Patan throughout the country." The fond mother counsels him not to be so impatient but to build up his strength first. "For that," she asserts, "Munjal is your ideal." Both Munjal and Minal have advised him not to accede to the proposal of Avanti and have tutored him how he should behave in the court when Ubak comes the next day to hear his decision.

One of the grand scenes in this book is the delineation of the royal court where an impressive array of Patan's strength is presented to Ubak, who is left in no doubt as to the invulnerability of Patan under Munjal. Jayadeva rewards the warriors of the battle of Panchaleshwar and pulls up Uda Mehta for having harassed defenceless people, the non-Jains of Khambhat. Kak is elevated to the status of a Bhataraj. With dignity, Jayadeva turns to Ubak and gives his decision that he will not accept the proposal to marry the Princess of Malva. The splendid handling of the court is the first victory of Jayadeva, which annoys Ubak and his companion Kirtidev but delights Munjal who exclaims to Kak, "This boy will certainly out-distance his forefathers, and will be more than a match even for crafty diplomats!"

In an exquisite interlude, Manjari's dreamland and her heroes are revealed. Kashmiradevi—Prasanna of *Patan-mi Prabhuta* who has risen to high stature in Patan—implores her to marry Kak. Manjari's goddess-like imperiousness is disdainful of average humanity. For her, marriage with an ordinary man, however brave and good, is an ugly anti-climax to her idealistic dreams. She has been wandering in the romantic land of Kalidasa and the wonderful children of light of that world are her heroes.

The great Parashurama, 'unconquerable' like Kailas and irresistible like the Fire of Doom,' who shook and subjected the world to his prowess, also fills her imagination. Human beings to her are pitiable figures devoid of any divine spark. Kak is a mere soldier of fortune, uneducated and unrefined. Her pride instinctively rebels against the suggestion of Kashmira who admiringly says, "Manjari, you are wonderful."

Manjari opens out her heart: "Neither bravery nor high status, neither wealth nor prestige in the world are of any worth."

"Then?"

"Culture, learning and refinement. If Brahmans lose their cultural eminence and purity of life, there will be chaos and the world will disintegrate and fall to pieces." Manjari's pride and consciousness of the supremacy of learning bursts out.

Poor Kak! In a mood of self-searching examination, he admits that, despite bravery, he is after all a pigmy and lacks learning and wisdom. But this is a challenge to his pride and he resolves to rise high in Manjari's eyes and become her hero!

However, after a little while, in order to escape from the persecutions of Uda who has set his heart on making Manjari his wife, she had to agree to marriage with Kak! As a condition precedent, however, she takes a promise from him that soon after the marriage she should not be called upon to live with him but be taken to her grandfather's home, and left there. Kak gives the promise but with a heavy heart.

Kashmira is happy; she has arranged for the secret marriage' of Kak and Manjari. When the ceremony is over, Kak is sad and the proud Manjari, full of anxiety for the uncertain future.

Kak is entertaining the hope that the marriage would bring him close to Manjari. With a soldier's directness, he tries to woo her but in vain and his embrace is violently repulsed by the infuriated Manjari who tauntingly tells him that his animality has further lowered him in her eyes. "The dog follows its mate," this is how she sums up the attempts of Kak to woo her.

Kak too is enraged at her strange behaviour and, as promised, decides to take her to Junagadh to her grandfather and leave her there. Before the plan matures, Manjari falls into the hands of her old admirer, Uda, who ignorant of her marriage with Kak removes her to a distant place and keeps her in solitary confinement.

Kirtidev, the young Malva warrior, a lieutenant of Ubak, seeks an interview with Munjal. In a powerful, appeal to Munjal to give a wise lead to Gujarat and Bharat in gathering all the monarchs in a common front against the invading barbarians, he pleads for a settlement between Gujarat and Malva. He unfolds a terrible picture of the coming ruin and desolation, if these monarchs do not unite to beat off the Muslim armies from the North. To weld them together and to create a united will, pleads the youthful Malvi hero, is an urgent task and only a great statesman of Munjal's stature can undertake such a difficult job.

But Munjal however sees deeper and does not agree with Kirtidev. Shrewdly enough, he reads into such a seemingly noble proposal only a sad story of individual jealousies and senses an attempt on the part of the King of Malva to absorb Gujarat, which is the weaker of the two. Kirtidev is adamant, and finding that his mission has failed, upbraids Munjal.

Both Minal and Kashmira have been pressing hard on Munjal for a second marriage, for they find him rapidly

ageing for want of companionship. Of late, he is often morose and weary. He is becoming an introvert. There are moments when Munjal wanders among the ruins of his past; how he loved his wife, Fulkunvar, and what callousness he showed to her after Minal had entered his life; how his only son was sent away in exile! He cries that only death can end his agony. Minal is distressed at the growing melancholy of Munjal and persists in persuading him to marry again. But the wise Munjal abruptly dismisses her request.

The finest passage in the book is the midnight scene in which Munjal and Minal thoroughly lay bare their souls and discuss this problem. Minal entreats him, "You are like a lone palm tree in a desert. The world and our self-imposed barriers have always kept me away from you" Minal weeps. Munjal asks her to look at what he calls the credit side of life, and confesses to her:

"You have inspired me and urged me to attain what was unattainable. You have 'indwelt' me. You have filled my whole being and given strength and power to my personality. Your love has been woven into every fibre of my being. How can I cut my roots?"

"Munjal! For our sake, you must marry." Minal speaks out her tortured mind.

"Why?"

"So long as you are alone, our hearts will bear the impress of our folly. Our love will reflect even obliquely a sense of sin," Minal explains.

"Sin? It is a dreadful commentary on our irreproachable life," Munjal feels shocked.

"In spite of our living within the rigid framework of social morality, there is sinfulness rooted deep in our love. *Our hearts beat in unison. That ought to be stopped.*" Minal pours out her soul's anguish.

Minal does not want to disown Munjal. She wishes to immolate her heart in the fire of ideal love. Munjal is overwhelmed by Minal's magnanimity, but settles the issue by declaring that to him renunciation is nobler and greater than fulfilment. The sublime unity of Minal and Munjal once again asserts itself.

Kirtidev is arrested at Munjal's instance and brought to the same place where the kidnapped Manjari is kept. Kak is worried and anxious to solve the mystery of Manjari's disappearance. After many hazardous adventures, he is able to trace Manjari who is proud and fascinating as ever. She informs him that Kirtidev is also a co-prisoner there and he too must be rescued! Kak is wonderstruck at Manjari's insistence and goes back to make arrangements for their liberation the next day.

Meanwhile, Munjal interviews Kirtidev in prison and offers him freedom if he accepts service under Jayadeva. This is spurned by the proud idealist, Kirtidev. Hot words are exchanged and Munjal says that on the pretext of fighting the Yavans, Kirtidev's game is to make Lakshmanvarma of Malva a *Chakravarti*. Both come to blows. In a deadly duel, Munjal is about to strike a blow at the young man but his hand is held back from behind. He turns back and sees Kak who has, in the meantime, discovered that Kirtidev is none other than the long lost son of Munjal himself. There is a touching reunion of the father and the son.

Kak sets free Manjari. She is in a chastened mood. She has already begun to understand and admire the great qualities of Kak who now appears to be worthy of her heart.

Jayadeva has heard much of Ranak, the paragon of beauty in Sorath. He is enamoured of her charm and sends Kak to her father with a proposal of marriage. Kak is on his difficult mission and meets Khengar, the Prince

of Sorath, on the way. The old king of Navaghan is on his death-bed and asks his sons to fulfil his last wish of vanquishing Jayadeva. Khengar alone comes forward and takes a vow before the dying father that he will fulfil his last wish.

Manjari has come out of her dream world. Kak's heroism, devotion and love have filled her mind and heart. Her education as a woman is complete. Her vanity, born of her superior education, has completely vanished. She repents for her studied indifference and harshness to Kak. She realises that it was largely due to Kak's courageous initiative and fighting skill that Uda, Navaghan, Khengar and even Kalbhairav were conquered. She is eager to surrender herself to the abounding love of Kak. Kak is aware of this transformation of Manjari. He has understood the language of her heart. Love's hand is upon them, and Kak and Manjari are seen together in a magnificent scene of romantic beauty.

Incidentally, Kak becomes a friend of Khengar and finds himself in a most awkward situation having to perform the mission of his king to seek the hand of Ranak whom Khengar loves. Khengar is with Ranak; Jayadeva's men are close upon them. Kak knows that Ranak also loves Khengar. She tells him that, alive or dead, she will *always* belong to Khengar.

In a chivalrous mood, therefore, Kak actually helps them to evade the chasing party. He is placed under arrest and brought to Jayadeva whose anger knows no bounds. Minal never wanted her son to marry Ranak and she is pleased at the failure of Kak's mission. Kak is released.

There is a conflict in Kirtidev's mind. He was brought up in Malva, and his heart longs to serve his adopted land. Munjal realises this dilemma and advises

his son to return to Avanti.

Tribhuvan and Kak leave for Lata, of which the former is the governor and like a lonely giant tree in a forest stands Munjal, calm, immovable and massive. Pathos and glory are fused in his isolation.

Rajadhiraja

Rajadhiraja describes the efforts of Jayadeva to become the Supreme Lord of Gujarat. He declares war on Sorath which however drags on relentlessly for many years. Jayadeva conquers large parts of Gujarat, but the fort of Junagadh proves almost impregnable. His heart is set on winning Ranak who had preferred to run away with Khengar than be his queen, and if for no other reason than to obtain her, he is determined to make an all-out bid to subjugate Junagadh.

Kak, who is now the Governor of Bhrigukaccha, is summoned to take over the command of the forces attacking Junagadh. Kak's departure is a signal for the revolt of the old patriots of Lata to regain their independence from the sway of Patan. Manjari proves herself to be the worthy comrade of the great warrior, Kak; she maintains a firm hand over the defences of the citadel against the rebels, determined to defy the besiegers at all costs. She displays amazing fortitude, leadership, resourcefulness and strength. News of the revolt in Bhrigukaccha reaches Jayadeva, but he deliberately prevents its reaching the ears of Kak and does not send immediate help to Manjari.

The finest part of the book deals with the siege of Junagadh and the portrayal of Ranak, the queen of Rā Khengar of Sorath. At long last, the siege of Junagadh ends in the storming of the great fort, when Khengar meets a glorious death. Jayadeva, exulting in the fact that Ranak has at last been won, carries her off with him.

to Wadhwani. But Kak is pledged to the loving memory of his dear friend, Khengar, and prevents his King from fulfilling his intentions towards Ranak. When arguments are of no avail, he forcibly imprisons Jayadeva in an underground cellar. The opportune arrival of Minaldevi and Jayadeva's Queen makes Kak's task easy. Ranak immolates herself on the funeral pyre of her husband, Khengar, on the banks of the Bhogava. Munshi has given a moving description of this tragic self-immolation of the great *sati*, whose name is enshrined in the folklore of Gujarat.

Kak is ultimately told of the critical situation of Manjari in the Bhrigukaccha fort and he rushes to her rescue. The sands are fast running out and starvation has taken a heavy toll of lives in the fort. Kak arrives too late and is completely unhinged by the heart-rending sight. Manjari dies in the arms of Kak, who however saves the fort. In depicting the scene of Manjari's death, Munshi's art reaches perhaps its greatest height, the description is characterised by beauty delineated with both restraint and realism.

The novel is rounded off with the triumphal procession of Jayadeva as the Rajadhiraja or Supreme Lord of Gujarat through the streets of Bhrigukaccha. Munjal, Kak and other great warriors are in the procession. Kak is raised to the supreme commandership and thus Manjari's cherished dream is realised even though she herself is no more. There is an all-pervading jubilation at the great victories of Jayadeva. The imperial banner proudly flutters over the fort and the streets of Bhrigukaccha resound with the heart-warming cries of "Jaya Somanath".

Thus ends the trilogy, a story of the rise of consolidated Gujarat; of three men, Munjal, Kak and Khengar; of three women, Minaldevi, Manjari and Ranak. It is a story which has lived and will live in the heart of Gujarat.

CHAPTER VI

HISTORICAL ROMANCES III

Prithvi Vallabh

WELL may Munshi regard *Prithvi Vallabh* as ‘the most typical’ of his historical romances and as his ‘most lucky work.’ More praised and more condemned than all his other novels, it has held the largest audience of them all. Apart from quite a few editions in Gujarati, it has gone into Hindi, Marathi, Bengali, Tamil and Kanarese. It has also gone on the Gujarat professional stage and survived about thirty years. It was picturised on the silent screen and again as a talkie which became one of Minerva Movietone’s biggest hits and one of the Indian screen’s great masterpieces.

This novel is based on the few surviving verses of a twelfth century Gujarati historical romance in poetry called *Munjarasa*, and on *Munja-prabandha*, a section in the well-known fourteenth century work, *Prabandha-chintamani*. In his *Glory that was Gurjaradesa*, Munshi described Munja as a ‘quivering flame of beauty.’ He ruled the Paramara Empire from 974 to 997 A.D., which then comprised Malva and considerable parts of modern Gujarat. Great conqueror, builder, lover, poet and patron of poets, his accomplishments have drawn fulsome tributes from many contemporary poets. Some of his verses also are found in several works. A contemporary poet, Padmagupta, author of the *Navasahasankacharita*, thus bids Munja farewell:

Thou source of joys voluptuous,
 The crest-jewel of kings
 Home of nectar which is gentility
 Ocean of wit, Oh Lord.
 Thou might of Ujjayini—
 Thou wert the God of love to maidens fair,
 Oh! brother unto the righteous,
 Inspirer of noble arts—
 Where art thou?
 Wherever thou art, wait:
 I am coming.

Prithvi Vallabh is a prose-poem. It is an exquisite piece of art, expressing the rich and refined poetic sensibility of the author. Its main interest derives from the fatal love of Munja and Mrinaldevi, the widowed sister of King Tailap of Telangana.

Munja is cast in a mighty mould. He dwells on Olympus. In his exuberant vitality and overflowing humanity and in his attitude to life, we see the quintessence of the Life Force. He is all human and nothing can restrain his passion for beauty and his love of life. Towards his end, when his physical bonds are about to be dissolved, his mind rises to sublime heights.

The character of Prithvi Vallabh reminds us of the central figure in a Greek tragedy. Munja lying chained in prison is like Prometheus bound to the rock. He shows the same indomitable spirit, and is as alive in death.

Mrinaldevi is an engrossing psychological study. Her progress from neurosis to health is one of the mainsprings of the story. In the delineation of her character are seen the author's understanding of the complexity of the feminine heart, his deft handling of decisive turns in a spiritual crisis, and his power to rehabilitate a lost soul.

The whole book glows with a brilliance which is the

outcome of an intense personal experience. Voluptuousness enshrined in impassioned utterances of astonishing beauty and force, the interplay of colour and music, the voice of ecstasy and heroic energy characterise *Prithvi Vallabh*.

Munshi has given the story of *Prithvi Vallabh* in one of his *Kulapati's Letters*; and no apology is necessary for indenting on this English summary which mirrors the poetry, pathos and power of the Gujarati original :

Munja, the great Paramara conqueror of Malva, who had routed Tailap, the king of Telangana, eighteen times, is finally vanquished, taken prisoner and brought to Manyakhet, the capital of Telangana (Malkhet near Hyderabad). The novel begins at this point.

Telangana, in fact, is ruled by the elderly Mrinalvati. A powerful woman, she has brought up her younger brother, Tailap, in the stern code of austerity which she follows herself. As her word is law in the realm, she has cast the life of her people with puritanical fervour in the same dreadful pattern. Theatres have been closed, music banned; gaieties banished; poets, musicians and artists sent into exile. Manyakhet is a joyless city, where laughter is a crime and joy a sin. Mrinalvati believes in blessedness, not in happiness. She does not want to govern; she wants to save the soul of her people.

The supreme moment of her life comes when Munja, the arch-enemy of Telangana, is brought in chains to the capital. As the royal prisoner is seen walking majestically in the glittering procession—not as one vanquished but like an invincible immortal—the hearts of all beholders are drawn to him. His magic smile moves even Mrinal to an unfamiliar mood. She decides to subdue Munja's mind and spirit; for, as rumour has it, he is the very essence of depravity; and to bring him to the path of righteousness would be the crowning achievement of her life.

On her first visit to the prisoner's cell, Mrinal tries to impress upon Munja what a wicked life his has been; she upbraids him for his depravity and tries to wound him by cruel words, but, as she makes little impression upon the gay and fascinating royal prisoner, she feels disgusted with herself.

Munja, realising the imperceptible change in Mrinal, speaks to her with bewitching effrontery: "You committed a great blunder when you decided to meet me," he says. "You came to win me and now you are won yourself. But do not worry, Mrinalvati. There is no greater happiness than to be won in this way." Mrinal, her conceit wounded, leaves him in a rage, cursing him for what she calls his 'lewd thoughts'. But the foundations of her self-confidence are shaken.

To humilitate the royal prisoner, Tailap places him in a wooden cage and exhibits him in the public square of the city as if he were a wild beast. But Munja gives the people of Manyakhet what they have been deprived of: charming smiles, sallies, songs, and the feeling of unending joy. To the joy-starved citizens, he appears as a messenger of love and light, and his laughter and songs prove infectious.

When next Mrinal visits Munja in his cell, her face is a mask of sternness. The doors of the cell, enveloped in gloom, are flung open; the torch is fixed by the guard in a bracket in the wall. Mrinal then enters the cell. Gradually, as her eyes become used to the surrounding darkness, she sees Munja lying in a corner as unconquered as ever, his chin cupped in his hands. Languidly, he raises his glance and says sweetly: "Welcome, most welcome! In fact, I was waiting for you."

These commonplace words are uttered in so tender

a tone that the armour of frigidity which she wears begins to fall from her, link by link, piece by piece

"Waiting for me?" Mrinal asks indignantly.

Prithvi Vallabh, still reclining on the bare floor, replies: "Yes, I *was* waiting for you. I was sure you would not fail to come". And then he adds: "Mrinalvati, are you well and happy?" His voice is full of strange music and, as she can see even in the dim light of the torch, his eyes are full of a careless gaiety

Concealing her perturbation, Mrinal says: "I have come here for one purpose, and one only: to save your soul. It is so sunk in sin. I want to set it on the path of righteousness"

Munja replies coolly that no one can save another.

Mrinalvati touches her forehead with a gesture of despair and asks: "Can one not do good to others and save them, Munja?"

But Munja replies. "I too have rescued the poor; made the miserable happy; though never, never, have I done it for their benefit I did it for selfish ends Doing them good made me immeasurably happy, it fed my vanity; it filled my mind with joy. I know the truth; you do not. When you make a fuss about doing good to others, you satisfy only your own vanity—nothing else"

When Mrinal proposes teaching him absolute purity, Munja raises his head proudly and says. "Absolute purity Mrinalvati, only the impure have the need to become pure What can you teach me? You are the daughter of a king. You have been reared in comfort and luxury In your vanity you believe yourself perfect But, in fact, you are intoxicated with self-righteousness How can you possibly teach me?"

With a mocking laugh, he continues. "Go forth and teach those who are unhappy, who are imperfect Un-

happiness does not touch me. How can you teach me, then? What is there for me to learn?"

As she comments on his conceit, Munja says solemnly: "Call it conceit, if you must. But do you know what my life has been? I was the child of a destitute woman, abandoned in a forest. Today I am the 'Darling of the Earth' (Prithvi Vallabh). Wild lionesses have fed me with their milk; elephants have fanned the air for me. At times I have begged in the streets; at others, I have given away thrones by way of gifts. I have risked my life for the afflicted and have torn the happy to pieces. I have revelled in the charms of lovely maidens and have beheaded girls as beauteous as Lakshmi. I have studied the Vedas; have walked the way of ascetics, difficult even for the Gods. I have composed love songs. There has been no delight which I have not tasted. What more do I want?" .

Munja throws his head back and pauses before continuing. His face is as beauteous as the evening sky, when all the stars are shining. He gazes intently at Mrinal for a while and then says softly: "In spite of the way I have lived, Mrinalvati, I have always been happy. Impurity has never touched me, nor unhappiness. What can you teach me?"

Mrinal stands speechless. Her throat is parched, her mind blank.

When Munja speaks again, it is with affectionate concern. "It is you who have to learn, Mrinal. You do not know the joy of life. You have yet to discover the mystery of the ecstatic dance...."

Mrinal raises her hands angrily as if to interrupt him, but ignoring her gestures, Munja goes on: "... of the joy in a lover's arms..."

Gritting her teeth, Mrinal shrieks. "Villain!"

Munja laughs, stands up, and, coming very close to

her, murmurs. "You have yet to gather the gems which are churned up by the ocean of delight "

Raging with fury, Mrinal breaks in crying: "Devil! Shameless brute! You will meet your fate tomorrow."

But Munja continues to smile: "Very well, go, if you like, but do not forget that I shall be waiting for you tomorrow evening."

Mrinal turns upon him furiously: "Waiting for me!"

"Yes, I have still to teach you many things"

"Rascal, your tongue has to be...."

"My tongue! What is the matter with it?" exclaims Munja mockingly. "It has won hearts as proud and stubborn as yours. There is no salvation for you except in loving the Earth's Darling, Mrinal, and in being loved by him"

Seized with uncontrollable fury, Mrinal strikes Munja in the face. Unabashed, Munja takes her in his arms, draws her close to him, and before she can say a word, plants a kiss on her quivering lips. Mrinal shrieks as though she has been stung by a bee. Her eyes are wide with fear and wonder and she trembles violently. Prithvi Vallabh faces her, gazing at her tenderly while a smile plays on his lips.

Mrinalvati calls the guard and gives orders that the hand with which Munja has caressed her be branded with the point of a spear.

The guard obeys, but Munja does not move a muscle as the red-hot iron touches his hand. As the horrible smell of burning flesh spreads through the prison cell, Mrinal cries. "Enough! Stop!"

Munja speaks in his usual cool way, but a trifle scornfully: "Is that all? Had I known that you would be pleased with only this much, I would have gladly offered

my whole arm to be branded." He adds drily: "Come tomorrow, Mrinalvati. You will have to nurse this wound."

Mrinalvati leaves, but with a heavy heart and an uncertain tread.

Mrinal is not quite the same after this interview—something has happened to her which she fails to understand. She feels as though she were floating in a warm current which flows past the distant stars; as if long years of penance were being rewarded by some strange self-realisation. The very idea that Munja might be killed by her brother upsets her. After a long struggle with herself, she ultimately goes to Munja and confesses. "I came to capture you, but, alas! I am captured myself."

Running parallel to the main plot, there is a sub-plot relating to the struggle of the Yadava king, Bhillam of Syundesh, to throw off the suzerainty of Tailap. Bhillam's daughter, Vilasvati, falls in love with Rasanidhi, the poet, who is also a prisoner and who is in reality Bhoja, the nephew and heir-apparent of Munja. Brought up in the stern school of Mrinal, Vilas has not known what love is, but she awakens to that glorious dawn when Rasanidhi opens her eyes to the splendours of poetry.

Rasanidhi and the other poets of Malva arrange for Munja to escape through an underground passage, but, when Rasanidhi comes to him in his cell, he refuses to escape so soon. Mrinal has fallen in love with him, and, as a true lover, he will not leave the prison without giving her a chance to fly with him.

Rasanidhi and his friends depart in despair. "Is he a man?" asks Bhoja on his return from the cell. "No, he is a God," retorts his friend Dhananjaya.

When Mrinal visits him again, Munja begs her to escape with him to Avanti. She suffers a terrific mental

conflict. Should she go with Munja, or can she devise some means of keeping him in Manyakhet for ever? She is older than Munja and not beautiful, and he might meet women in gay Avanti who would make him forget her.

Before long she reveals the plot to her nephew Satyasraya, Tailap's son. She wants Munja to live but as a perpetual prisoner at Manyakhet where she can meet him every day.

Now that the plot has been discovered, Tailap is furious and Munja is transferred to another cell.

Rasanidhi, or rather Bhoja, runs away with Vilasvati and Satyasraya pursues them. The two men fight a duel and Satyasraya is overpowered. He flees, but before doing so, cuts off the head of Vilasvati who had been pledged to him by her father, and who had preferred Rasanidhi to him.

Bhoja and the rest of the poets escape from Manyakhet, leaving Munja to his fate. So also do the Yadav Bhilla and his wife, forswearing allegiance to Tailap.

Filled with loathing at his sister's fall and Munja's wickedness, Tailap decrees that Munja be led from door to door with a begging bowl and then be put to death in the public square under the feet of an elephant.

Munja is led through the streets of Manyakhet in chains with a beggar's bowl in his hands, but the ardour of his spirit is undamped and his poise undisturbed. Supremely indifferent to the terrible fate that awaits him, he moves among the admiring crowd, radiating joy and winning ecstatic admiration.

Tailap is happy. Before long his bitterest enemy, the cause of his sister's fall, will be no more. Mrinal, standing near Tailap in the public square, is in inexpressible agony as Munja approaches her with the beggar's bowl with the tenderness of the lover that he is.

Inexorably, the story moves to a sombre end that may best be given in the words of the novel.

"Are you happy, Mrinalvati?" asks Munja and the longing of a man who has met his beloved after long absence is in his voice.

Mrinal cannot return the smile at once; but the magic of his smile and voice is upon her; at last she smiles—slowly, sweetly, though sadly. Her eyes are wet with tears and the glances of the lovers meet as if in an embrace.

Everyone is as if in a trance. They all catch their breath as the Darling of the Earth extends his beggar's bowl to her. At the same time, he asks tenderly: "What can you give me now? You have given me all you could."

These words have a maddening effect on Mrinal. A hurricane sweeps over her spirits. She forgets her misery, the occasion and the place, and looks at her lover as she has never looked at anyone before.

Munja says: "Beauteous one! Do not be afraid. The world is both wicked and stupid. It will always remain so. But you have made your life a thing of beauty and joy; let the world say what it likes."

Mrinal forgets herself—forgets the presence of Tailap; forgets the spectators, forgets even her own dignity and reserve. She throws away the pot in which she has brought the alms to be given to Munja and falls at his fettered feet. "Forgive me, my Lord! Darling of the Earth!" she cries, "I have proved to be your murderer." And she places the dust from Munja's feet on her head.

"You, my murderer!" replies Munja. "Why? My death was determined at the very moment of my birth. You have nothing to do with it."

Tailap springs down from the platform on which he is standing and drags Mrinal away. The citizens and the soldiers stand with tears in their eyes.

Munja turns to Tailap and asks: "What is the use of making this poor woman a victim of your wrath against me?"

"Be quiet, low-born," shouts Tailap.

"Why should I be quiet?" Munja asks with a smile "It is for you to keep quiet Your triumph is at an end."

Tailap is so enraged that he cannot utter a word

Munja, his face glowing with power, looks round and says loudly. "Fool! Can you never see the truth? My nephew Bhoja, bold as a lion, is on his way to occupy the throne of Avanti. In Syundesh, Bhillam, once your feudatory, is no longer your friend, nor my enemy Your sister—all your subjects—are not yours, but mine. Whose has been the triumph—mine or yours?"

Tailap retorts: "This elephant of mine will show you who has triumphed," and, leaving Mrinal on the platform, he comes forward.

Munja laughs aloud: "Will it be your triumph? You wanted to bend me to your will; I will die as unyielding as ever You prided yourself upon your righteousness, but you will have committed the heinous crime of killing a king. Who is the conqueror?" And Munja's voice is full of contempt which is heard by the whole crowd.

Tailap bites his lips; his eyes have a poisonous look. "Soldiers! Take him where he should be," he commands.

"Why worry?" replies Munja, "I am going there myself."

So saying he steps majestically towards the elephant. All eyes are fixed on him Everyone holds his breath.

Quietly, Munja walks ahead. Tailap and a few soldiers follow him He comes and stands near the elephant for a while On Tailap's orders, his fetters are removed.

Munja, now freed, stands erect and pushes back the locks which hang over his forehead. He then turns his face towards the people and towards Mrinal. In his eyes is no fear, only the light of love. His sweet smile, tender as a caress, plays upon his lips.

The people shudder at the prospect of his death. Men and women begin to sob. Mrinal looks on as one dazed.

"Tailap, just see," says Munja quietly. "Is not the stage a fitting one for the Darling of the Earth?"

As Tailap stands with his lips compressed, despair suddenly steals into his heart already full of hatred. He begins to feel that his enemy, even in the very moment of his death, has triumphed. He had hoped to see Munja's self-confidence shaken.

"Come! Or, I shall call my men to do their duty," he cries furiously.

Munja looks with contempt at Tailap and steps near the trunk of the elephant. There he stands, hesitating for a second. Tailap gets the chance he has been waiting for.

"Are you frightened?" he asks.

"The earth will crash before its 'Darling' trembles. Fool! I was also thinking...."

"Of what?"

"Only this," Munja replies, looking up with pride and his eyes full of longing "I was only thinking of poor Saraswati (Goddess of Learning). When I am gone, Lakshmi (Goddess of Wealth) will go back to Vishnu. Shri (Goddess of Victory) will repair to Kartikeya (God of War). But Saraswati, poor Saraswati, she, and she alone, will not know whom to go to!"

Saying so, Munja turns his back on Tailap with inexpressible contempt and addresses the elephant as if he alone counts: "Best among elephants! Prithvi Vallabh. best among kings, has now come to you."

The elephant stands as if in deep thought; then playfully waves its trunk, which Munja has been softly rubbing. Ultimately, with perfect composure, he clings to the trunk. The mahout pricks the elephant with his goad; twirling its trunk round Munja, it lifts him off the ground.

The elephant raises its trunk and lowers it again and again. The people, with tears in their eyes, see Prithvi Vallabh smiling, his eyes flashing with pride, looking like Shri Krishna standing triumphantly in the coils of the serpent king, Kaling.

The elephant snorts and gives one swift swing to its trunk Munja's war cry resounds triumphantly: Jaya Mahakala

The crowd stands horror-struck. Mrinal's piteous shrieks ring out, piercing earth and heaven with wild, inconsolable grief.

Munja, for a moment, disappears under the foot of the elephant. The animal puts the foot down, presses it hard; a cracking sound is heard. Then silence....

The body of Prithvi Vallabh lies on the ground, crushed and flattened.

CHAPTER VII

HISTORICAL ROMANCES IV

Jaya Somanath

Jaya Somanath is a courageous work of art depicting the mortal crisis through which Gujarat passed when Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni attacked and destroyed the thrice-sacred temple of Somanath. It is a moving and fascinating account of the crusade which Gujarat fought to defend its honour and save its soul. It differs in technique from the author's other novels. The style is mature and resilient and, if at times the expression seems inadequate to the thought, there are passages touching the sublime which more than compensate for it. The fusion of the struggle between the spirit and the lust, the heroic patriotism locked in mortal combat with the ruthless invader, the symbolic undertones of Munshi's narrative and the undying appeal of the theme invest the novel with a character all its own.

The most striking feature of the book is the sustained atmosphere of national resistance to the invader—its fury, gusto and grandeur. The two dances of Chaula which provide the prologue and epilogue to this drama soften its otherwise unrelieved heroic tone.

The historical and spiritual continuity of the sacred shrine of Somanath from *Satyayuga* right upto *Kaliyuga* is described with rare art. Around this ancient temple, which is the centre and the inspiration of the life of Gujarat, the epic struggle takes place. The desert wanderings of Sajjan Chauhan under a rain of fire-laden sand-clouds, the supreme courage and sacrifice of Ghogha Rana,

and the miraculous awakening in Gujarat brought about by his spirit, the burning passion of Samant and the glorious resistance of Bhimadeva are depicted in their elemental grandeur.

The soul of the crusade is Gangasarvagna, High Priest of the Temple. He represents all that is best and most abiding in our culture and civilisation. He has the sage's vision, achieved with pious devotion, which enables him to envisage the entire destiny of mankind and the world. In the tragic catastrophe which overwhelms his country and its greatest shrine, he alone can see the distant light with which he seeks to rekindle the flickering hope in the hearts of the people.

Chaula is an incommensurable being. She is not of this earth. She embodies that deathless love which is the purest form of *bhakti*. She is a born Gopi, whose every cry is a song and whose every gesture a dance. Her devotion to Lord Shiva imbues her personality with an ethereal light.

Among the other characters, Bhimadeva, Mahmud, Samant and Ganga are happily drawn. Bhimadeva, the lion-hearted king, has many great qualities of leadership. With his undying faith in Somanath, his high patriotism, his fierce resistance and his superhuman courage, he is the symbol of his country's heroism.

Sultan Mahmud, in this work, is a great military genius. He has the singleness of purpose and the practical wisdom which carry him from victory to victory. He has irresistible personal charm and his hold over the men whom he inspires and leads is tremendous. In the most terrifying crises, he is calm and confident.

Samant, the man behind the whole resistance, is perhaps the saddest figure in the novel. His passionate determination to foil the invaders of his country carries him

through innumerable disasters until the tragic, inevitable end. One of Chaula's earthly links is her affection for Samant. They are, to some extent, kindred souls, devotees unswerving in their loyalty to their respective ideals.

* * *

It is the bright half of Kartik, 1082 of the Vikrama Era (1024 A.D.)* Crowds of pilgrims are on their way to Prabhas Patan to join the festival of the full moon sacred to Lord Somanath and to bathe in the sacred waters of the Hiranya invested with the triple sanctity of the Ganga, Yamuna and Saraswati. The golden domes of the temple stand out against the clear sky. The sacred hymns chanted by a hundred Brahmans fill the air and make the atmosphere inspiring. And as the temple dancers dance from dawn to midnight in front of the Lord, joy is in every heart. The shrine is presided over by Gangasarvagna, the greatest *acharya* of the Pashupat cult of the time, whose vast knowledge and life-long *tapascharya* had attracted universal admiration.

Next to the shrine live four hundred dancers dedicated to God Somanath. To them dancing before the Lord is both prayer and worship. Ganga, their head and guardian, is a wise woman now in her fifties. Once she had been the loveliest dancer in the temple.

As the festive day comes, Chaula, Ganga's eighteen-year old daughter, beautiful in body and pure in soul, begins to prepare herself for her maiden dance on the festive occasion with the impatience of a young bride. Her mind is full of strange fancies. Today she will be allowed to dance before the Lord. Then she will be just as Parvati, His Consort, was when she wooed Him—nay more, she will be pouring out the yearnings of her heart in song and step

* The summary is taken from *Kulapati's Letters of Munshi*

and gesture and winning Him as her Lord and Master, an achievement greater than Parvati's.

For years, Chaula had set her heart on this supreme effort. She had learnt all the eighteen styles of dancing, the twelve ways of *mudra* and the seven kinds of music. Now the moment is coming when Somanath, the mighty Lord, will accept her as His chosen bride.

In the evening, the *sabhamandap* looks like the assembly of the gods. Holy water brought day after day from the distant Ganga drips from a golden water pot on the *linga* of the Lord covered with fresh *bili* leaves. The light of innumerable lamps, studded with gems and hanging from the ceiling, illuminates the *mandap* with rainbow colours.

Bhimadeva, the young Chaulukya King of Gujarat, with his retinue, is there on his annual pilgrimage to the shrine of the guardian God of his land

Gangasarvagna, the venerable master, is leading the prayers and performing *arti*

When the ceremony is over, the sage gives the word: "Let the dance begin now."

The sage immediately sees the blushing Chaula walking up to the open space in front of the little door of the sanctum to the rhythm of her anklets. He feels happy as his mind goes back to the day when he was young and so was Ganga and when their life was transfigured by a great love, of which Chaula was the child.

When Chaula steps in front of the sanctum and prostrates herself, she sees the smile of the sage and feels encouraged. Then she begins her dance, descriptive of the dread penance which Parvati, the daughter of the Himalaya, performed when she wooed Shankar, the great ascetic. Her mood, however, is not of one performing penance but of a bride-elect. Her steps are full of joyous

impatience She expresses by voice and gesture of beauty, shyness and hesitancy, hope, fear and despair, above all, longing which yearns to be one with the Beloved.

Soon Chaula forgets herself. She is now Parvati herself. Ecstatically, she expresses what she feels—a sense of complete surrender to the Lord. The assembly, as if hypnotised, holds its breath, looking at the elusive figure of grace and rhythm. She dances as if on air. Then comes the supreme moment. Her love and devotion bodying forth in tone, gesture and step reach their maddening climax. . . . Then overcome by sheer exaltation, she collapses. The music stops. The assembly looks on in awed silence.

Gangasarvagna gets up from his seat and takes the unconscious Chaula in his arms. "Supreme Lord, accept this little dancer as Yours. Hereafter she alone will dance before Thee on every Monday," he says.

"Thine, Thine, Lord, in this life and for ever," mutters the half-conscious Chaula.

Soon thereafter, Damodar Mehta, the minister of Bhimadeva, brings the news that the army of Mahmud, Sultan of Ghazni, is on the march, bent on invading Gujarat. His intentions appear to be to destroy the shrine of Somanath in the same way as he had destroyed those at Thaneswar and Mathura.

"Does the Yavan dare to lower the flag of the Supreme Lord? What arrogance?" exclaims Gangasarvagna.

"Mahmud is more dreadful than the God of Death," replies Damodar Mehta.

"I am ready to face the *mlechha*. If he comes to Gujarat, he will walk into the jaws of death. I will show him of what mettle we are made," says Bhimadeva with pride.

"My son, Truth alone wins. The Lord will grant you success," Gangasarvagna gave his blessings.

After the festivities end, Bhimadeva comes for a final *darshan* of the Deity before leaving for his capital and finds Chaula praying alone with her head laid on the ground. The king, who had been struck by the beauty and charm of the temple dancer, follows her when, after prayer, she goes to have a dip in the sea in the shimmering moonlight. As Chaula emerges from the water, the head of the terrible Kapali sect catches hold of her. According to the frightful rituals of this sect, a human being has to be offered as a sacrifice to Bhairava, the dread form of the Lord Shankar, at midnight of the festivities.

Bhimadeva kills the Kapali and rescues Chaula, who had fainted. When she regains consciousness, he discloses his identity to her.

"Chaula, I am now going to the war to fight the *mlechha*," the youthful king says.

"Come back here after you have destroyed the *mlechha*. May Lord Somnath protect you," the grateful Chaula replies.

"Will you wait for me?" asks the king impulsively.

"When you return, I shall certainly be at the feet of my Lord," she replies. The king feels hurt at this indifferent reply.

Next day, when the dead body of the Kapali priest is found on the bathing ghat, it is felt as an ominous portent. Does it presage the victory of the *mlechha*? Shivarashi, the principal disciple of Gangasarvagna, at any rate, thinks it does.

Ghogha Chauhan is the ruler of Ghogha Gadh, a frontier fort which guards the north-western route which passes through the desert. His son, Sajjansingh and grandson, Samant, are also among those who had come to Prabhas

on their annual pilgrimage. After Bhimadeva leaves, Gangasarvagna instructs Sajjan and his son to return post-haste to Ghogha Rana and ask him to intercept Mahmud's passage through the desert. The sage blesses the Chauhans as they get ready to leave and Chaula gives young Samant, by way of blessings, the water which had become thrice sacred for having been used for worshipping the image of Somanath.

On leaving Prabhas, Sajjan sends his son Samant to Jhalor to warn its ruler to get ready to face the invader, and to save time himself decides to cut across the desert by an unfamiliar route on his beloved dromedary, 'Padamdi'. For four days, Sajjan bravely rides through the unknown desert vastness heading northwards. On the fifth day, however, he is caught in a sandstorm and is almost suffocated by the blinding, scorching clouds of sands. Sustained only by faith and with the name of Somanath on his lips, he rides through the storm unhurt.

When Sajjan leaves the region of the storm, he hears the wild screeches of vultures. He thinks that evidently they had been attracted by carcasses, and soon he comes upon the dead bodies of soldiers who had met their fate in the storm. He also arrives at a village which stands desolate and ghastly. A sickening stench of rotting corpses comes from it. The temple is in charred ruins. The trees are bereft of foliage. The grim realisation then dawns on the brave Chauhan that Mahmud had already passed Multan, Sapadalaksh and Nuddul, even Ghogha Gadh and now was half way through the desert.

Undaunted, Sajjan presses faster and still faster towards his ancestral fort. But soon he comes across a search party of the Sultan, is captured and taken to Mahmud. Sajjan feels happy that the Lord has made him the instrument of destroying Mahmud.

Sajjan advises the Sultan not to take the beaten path as he was doing, as a vast army of Hindu kings was ready to oppose him on the way. The best way, he says, is to take an out-of-the-way but shorter route over which he would guide the invading army.

Mahmud accepts the advice and, with Sajjan as the guide, the army of the Sultan begins its march through the expanse of the trackless sands.

"Lord Rudra, where are Thy sandstorms?" prays Sajjan and on the fourth day, the prayer is answered. Sandstorms rise in blinding fury and the Chauhan looks on proudly as the advancing forces are engulfed in swirling, scorching eddies of sand. One-third of Mahmud's forces thus meets its fate. Sajjan, happy in the thought that he had done his duty, clings to his beloved camel with "Jaya Somanath" on his lips as the sands overwhelm him. The Sultan, however, does not lose his nerve and, with cool precision, reorganises his forces and beats a hasty retreat from the danger zone, leading them back to the beaten path which they had left a few days before.

Samant, obedient to his father's wishes, goes to Jhalor but he finds its old and foolish ruler adamant; he had promised the Sultan a free passage through his territory and he would not break his promise. As he leaves Jhalor in disgust and proceeds towards Ghogha Gadh, he meets crowds of refugees fleeing for their life, who tell him heart-rending stories of the havoc wrought by the *mlechha*.

Samant, torn between distress and anxiety, no sooner reaches Bhammariya on the outskirts of Ghogha Gadh than he breaks down at the sight of its desolation. Not a living soul is seen anywhere. The family shrine of the Chauhans had been burnt down and all the houses demolished.

When searching for some living witness to tell him the

story of this disaster, he finds Nandidutt, the family priest of his royal house, hiding in one of the broken-down houses. The priest narrates to him the tragic happenings of the last few days. Mahmud's armies wanted to bypass Ghogha Gadh. Ghogha Bappa, the guardian of Somanath's sanctity, however, would not let the invader pass unchallenged. He got the gates of the fort opened and ordered all his men to fall upon the *mlechhas*. The Chauhan and his men were few, the enemies numberless and the old Ghogha Bappa and his numerous sons and grandsons and clansmen were massacred to a man by the *mlechhas*.

Nandidutt then describes in broken-hearted accents how the heroic women of Ghogha Gadh prepared for the *jauhar*; how they prayed to the Gods that they should be joined soon to their husbands who had lost their lives; how the funeral pyres were stacked; how he, the family priest, performed the rites and how the brave women, without exception, cheerfully courted death by fire.

On his way back, Samant is taken captive by a search party and taken to the Sultan. Samant tries to assassinate Mahmud but fails in the attempt. The invader, who has learnt of the fate which had overtaken Samant's family, generously grants the brave Chauhan his life and lets him go free to pursue his course.

Samant, in grim despair, returns to Prabhas by the way he came, in the company of Nandidutt and informs Gangasarvagna of the fate which had overtaken Ghogha Bappa and his family. He also begs the sage to evacuate the fort taking the divine *linga* with him.

"Gurudeva, none of you are aware of Mahmud's prowess. His fighting skill is miraculous; his armies are as wide as the sea."

"My son, have you lost faith in the infinite power and mercy of Lord Somnath? Whatever He wills only will

happen," replies the sage. "I will not remove the *linga* from here. If necessary, I alone shall stand between It and the *mlechha*."

The sage then sends Samant to help Bhimadeva in rallying the forces with which to oppose the Sultan. He arrives at Anahilavad Patan, the capital of Gujarat, and apprises Bhimadeva, who has already summoned to his aid the kings of Kutch, Sorath, Srimal, Lata and Konkan, of all that had happened. When they were discussing the strategy of offence against the Sultan, Samant could not help bursting out, "I am sick to death at hearing this foolish talk about beating the armies of Mahmud. You do not know his strength or his genius. You do not care to estimate the overwhelming nature of his forces. Hearing you talk in this way, I feel that the *mlechha* has been sent down as a scourge by Rudra Himself to punish us for our short-sightedness and want of unity"

The king, thereafter, decides to leave the country open and concentrate on the defence of Prabhas Patan. Gangasavagna gives his blessings to Bhimadeva on whom is laid the principal responsibility of defending the shrine. "I am but an instrument of His will. A dreadful enemy is at our doors and if He wills, we will drive him back," says Bhimadeva with humility.

"Look here, my son," says the venerable sage. "You do your duty and the Lord will decide what is best for us. One thing I know. Before the Creation, it was here that Shiva, the Lord of All, manifested Himself in this *linga*, and till the time of the Final Deluge, his *linga* shall be here. Nothing can alter this. Do not worry about me. I will always be with the Lord. I stand here as a rock. Let the *mlechha* do his worst."

Bhimadeva soon organises the defence of Somanath. Old men, women and children are sent to Khambhat by the

sea; Ganga, of all the women, remains behind to look after the old sage and so does Chaula who could not dream of leaving her Lord nor deny herself the daily ritual of dance before Him. Left alone, she comes in contact with Bhimadeva and seeing his courage, resourcefulness and stern resolve, begins to feel as if her Divine Lord had assumed a mortal shape.

The invaders now invest the fort of Prabhas Patan. From the parapet walls the besiegers see the green-turbaned, red-bearded Sultan, moving from point to point, arranging his troops. Then he leads assault after assault on the fort, but without success.

Bhimadeva, in the course of the defence, performs prodigies of valour. The Parmar King guarding the Dwarka gate is killed. The sage blesses the dying hero and exhorts the survivors to defy death and defend the shrine.

Chaula's imagination is fired by the heroic frenzy of the brave defenders. She lives in an enchanted world. The fort of Prabhas is to her Mount Kailas and Bhimadeva no other than Lord Shankar Himself, ready to destroy the demon Tripura. Self-pledged bride of the Lord as she has been, she is moved by the magic of heroic deeds and has come to believe Bhimadeva to be her Lord. "Parvati and Parameshwar" she thinks they are—the king and herself.

In the meantime, Samant, young in years but old with the load of suffering and with the wisdom born of grim despair, returns to the fort in the company of Nandidutt. He tells Bhimadeva of the arrangement he had made to defend Anahilavad if the need arises and how he had induced Bhoja Parmar to send his forces to the rescue.

"Samant, you are not a man, you are a God"

"If I had been a man, I would have died many a death, seeing what I have suffered," replies Samant with a sad smile.

The only soft corner left in Samant's heart is for the temple dancer, Chaula, who had once given him the holy waters and blessed him as a sister. He is, therefore, wroth to see the young King taking advantage of the innocence and faith of the only being left in the world who is bound to him in affection. He, therefore, upbraids Bhimadeva for toying with her heart, for a high-born king that he was would never dream of making a temple dancer the Queen of Gujarat. Bhimadeva undeceives Samant; he is, he confesses, deeply in love with Chaula and would marry her despite the social gulf which separates them.

Gangasarvagna also agrees to Bhimadeva's proposal. Chaula who in self-intoxicated devotion continues to feel that the King is Lord Shankar in mortal body, is joined to him in wedlock.

Shivarashi, the principal disciple of the sage and others like him who belonged to the Tripurasundari cult, are shocked to hear of this marriage. On special occasions, according to the rituals of the *Vama Marga*, they had worshipped Chaula, when in a trance of ecstasy, as Tripurasundari, the voluptuous aspect of Shiva's spouse, and to them, this marriage was the height of sacrilege. As the fall of the fort became a question of hours, they come to look upon Gangasarvagna as guilty of unforgivable sin and deserving of being removed from office: Prabhas, they feel, is also the home of sin.

The epic defence of the fort however continues Hour after hour, the fortunes of the battle fluctuate. But the invader's strength is boundless; Indians, in spite of heroic resistance, are losing ground.

The next day Mahmud's men attack the fort in successive waves, but are beaten back. Shivarashi, in a frenzy of disgust at his Guru, establishes contact with the invader through a subterranean passage and brings his men into

the fort. A renegade chief opens one of the gates to the enemy and the invaders, with fearful yells, swarm into the fort. Bhimadeva fights to the last making a last attempt to stem the tide of men but without success. His brave warriors die to a man. He himself is wounded and loses consciousness.

Gangasarvagna knows that the end has come. Placing the unconscious Bhimadeva in charge of Samant, he has him carried to a boat, which with Chaula leaves for Kanthkot in Kachha.

Gangasarvagna realizes the deeper meaning of God's will. Maha Rudra, the Divine Destroyer, is out to destroy; it is now only for him to submit to His will.

Mahmud, with his select warriors, reaches the temple and is wonderstruck by the dazzling grandeur of the temple. Shivarashi, to save himself, offers him 'the wealth of the temple.

The Sultan in anger shouts; "Kaffir, Mahmud does not deal in idols. He breaks them." He pushes aside the traitor and enters the temple. There, in front of the *linga* stands the venerable sage, Gangasarvagna, with unflinching eyes.

"Move aside," commands Mahmud.

"The Lord and I are one, beyond change, infinite," coolly replies the sage.

Mahmud's sword flashes. The head of the noblest of men, severed from his body, rolls at the base of the Lord's image which had been dearer to him than life.

The invader stands for a moment awe-struck in front of the *linga*, then snatches a mace from a bearer and with one stroke breaks it into three. The Light of the world is extinguished.

Afraid of meeting the armies of Bhoja, Mahmud

escapes through Kutch losing most of his men, horses and material on the way.

Bhimadeva reorganises life in Gujarat once the invader had left the land, and plans are made for a more majestic temple to rise in the place of the old.

Chaula, now residing in the royal palace at Khambhat, is now a pathetic figure. Her world had vanished. She now moves in a living hell. Her every moment is anguished by a sense of inexplicable guilt. She was a self-pledged bride of Lord Shiva; in a moment of blind folly, she saw Him in a mortal; now she bore his child! No more for her the ecstacy of the bride of the Eternal. No more for her the ecstatic delight of the dance of surrender. No more is she a divinity, but only a woman with a child by a man—just a queen lost in ceremonial existence, never to be a free temple dancer—in short, a contemptible creature. All light goes out of her life and she lives in a frozen world, shuddering at every human association.

Months pass. Chaula is delivered of a son. Khambhat celebrates the festive occasion of the birth of a prince. The mother, however, is heart-broken. She cannot bear even to look at the child she had given birth to. She wants to die but like a walking ghost lives on in the hope that once the temple is rebuilt, she will dance before her Lord, just once.

Ultimately, the happy news is brought to Chaula that the new temple of Somanath is complete and soon the confederate kings will assemble there to instal the new *linga*. She immediately leaves for Prabhas, caring neither for herself nor her child. She is only interested, hour after hour, in weaving for herself a festive dress in which to dance on the day Lord Somanath's *linga* is to be re-installed. Samant who has also come to Prabhas to

witness the installation meets her, his adopted sister, the only link which binds him to life.

On the 15th day of the bright half of *Asvin*, crowds again gather at Prabhas. The new temple once again reverberates to the exultant shouts of "Jaya Somanath", as the new *linga* is installed in the presence of confederate kings.

On the morning of the day, Chaula requests Bhimadeva to give her permission to dance before the Lord after the installation. The king is angry and sternly turns down the suggestion Chaula is the queen of Gujarat; she is no longer a temple dancer and cannot dance, much less before a public assembly.

For a moment Chaula feels crushed, the only hope for which she has lived so long is on the point of being extinguished. Then she seeks the aid of Samant.

In the new *sabhamandap* of the temple, the installation ceremony is conducted by a new *Sarvagna* by leading the prayers and chanting *mantras*. After the ceremony is over, he calls for a dance, when out of the crowd of dancers, a dancer with her face veiled, comes forward with joyful steps. She commences her dance in a spirit of ecstasy which holds the assembly in breathless attention. There is not a step which does not vibrate with deep emotion. The audience is spell-bound as they see the dance develop into a poignant expression of misery, despair and repentence as the dancer pours out the agony of her soul in sobbing rhythms.

At the moment when the congregation, transfixed with wonder and admiration, is hardly able to breathe, the dancer drops to the ground.

As she falls to the ground, Bhimadeva recognises his queen and, in a sudden fit of anger, draws his sword to cut her down. But he stands frozen with horror when he

sees that she has propitiated Somanath in the way she knew. She had lived for the Lord, and was now one with Him

The assembly, in awed silence, looks at Chaula's offering her all to God, as Samant sobbing like a child, disappears in the darkness!

* * *

An interregnum of twenty years separate the creative art of *Patan-ni-Prabhuta* and that of *Jaya Somanath*. The racy narrative, the living conversation; the vivid delineation of character and the breathlessly-developing story are all there. But to these elements are added the elements of a deeper and richer creativeness. The colourful descriptions of the shrine, of Samant's ride through the desert, of Ghogha Rana's tragic self-immolation, of the haunted life of Chaula as she weaves her dress for the last dance and of the ecstasy of her dance are some of the finest word-pictures in any modern Indian language. Added to these are the profound characterisation of Gangasarvagna and Samant and a historic interpretation of the unequal struggle between the quixotic heroism of the Indian rulers and the ruthlessness of Mahmud, one of the greatest military geniuses of history.

CHAPTER VIII

HISTORICAL ROMANCES V

Bhagna Paduka

Bhagna Paduka, which rounds off Munshi's epic of Chaulukyan Gujarat is a grim tragedy exuding inexpressible despair. Its theme is the fall of Gujarat before the armies of Ala-ud-Din Khalji in 1299 A.D. and the slaughter and destruction which followed. The story is narrated by the departed spirits of some of those who took part in that drama to the author who meets them when walking on the banks of the Yamuna where he comes across the broken sandals of Bada Maharaj.

In early life, Gangeswara or Bada Maharaj, son of the High Priest of King Karnadeva of Gujarat, meets with a tragic experience. He falls in love with a dancing girl who wants him to let her worship at the shrine. He agrees to do so but later discovers that she is the daughter of an untouchable. To expiate for his sin, he prepares to give up his life when the girl offers her head rather than let him die.

The spirit of Malik Kafur, perhaps the most wicked and the cleverest of men in medieval Indian history, narrates his life story. The spirit tells the author about his early life, how he became a homo-sexual to achieve his ambition, how he was converted to Islam, how he was sold into slavery. Other spirits narrate the story of Malik Kafur's ultimate rise to the position of the favourite of Ala-ud-Din Khalji.

Ala-ud-Din and his court are described in light but effective vignettes in which their fierce and aggressive

strength is picturesquely contrasted with the decadence of Chaulukyan Gujarat.

Madhav, the minister of Karnadeva, is portrayed in all his guile and hypocritical religiosity. His betrayal of his country, his humiliation at the Sultan's court, his fate when, in poetic justice, he sees his action resulting in his daughter consigning herself to fire and his heroic son-in-law spitting upon him, are described graphically.

The hero of the story, however, is Bada Maharaj. His life is one of unrelieved tragedy and gloom. But he epitomises in himself the spirit of the era of heroic resistance when the Hindus, despite military disasters and political subjugation, kept the torch of their religion and culture burning.

In parts, particularly in his description of the death of the dancing girl and the self-immolation of the heroic girl, Shyamal, Munshi reaches the climax of his narrative art, both in picturesqueness and poignancy. But the atmosphere of the book as a whole is overcast by grim despair and it makes sad reading.

Bada Maharaj became a learned scholar after a brilliant career as a student. He was brought up and educated by his mother's father, Ganganath, who was the head of a monastery. After completing his studies in Kashi, Bada Maharaj returns to his grandfather, accompanied by Gajanan who had started as his co-student but ultimately becomes his devoted companion.

When he arrives at the monastery, a feast and dance are arranged in honour of Bada Maharaj. One of the dancers, Anangana, casts such a spell on him that he asks Gajanan to arrange a meeting. When they meet, he feels as if they had been lovers in a previous birth and soon both become devoted to each other.

On the evening of Bada Maharaj's installation as the

head of the monastery, Anangana surrenders herself completely to him and extracts a promise from him that he himself would officiate when she offers worship at the shrine—a wish she has evidently cherished from her infancy. In a moment of intimacy, the dancing girl tells Bada Maharaj of their childhood; how she was the daughter of the *bhangi* untouchable of the monastery; how she from a distance worshipped Bada Maharaj as a little boy, how in childhood innocence he took her into the temple; how, when the sacrilege was discovered, he was sent away to Kashi, and her people beaten almost to death; how she ran away to a forest and was picked up by a dancing girl, Saraswati, who was passing that way, and how under Saraswati's tutelage, she had blossomed forth as Anangana, the dancer.

Shocked by the revelation, Bada Maharaj, who had promised that Anangana should worship at the shrine of the monastery himself officiating as the *acharya*, now finds it sacrilegious to allow her to do so and decides to put an end to his life by a fast unto death. Anangana, too, is full of remorse for the sin she has brought upon one whom she loved so well. She therefore makes up her mind to save him at the cost of her own life. She takes his friend, Gajanan, into her confidence and he agrees to help her. She asks him to cut off her head, put it at the bottom of a basket, cover it with flowers and take it to Bada Maharaj as an offering.

Unsuspectingly, Bada Maharaj accepts the basket of flowers and when offering floral worship to God Mahadeva, discovers to his horror that it is Anangana's head that he is offering as a sacrifice to the deity. He is overwhelmed with grief and at the instance of Gajanan, performs the last rites of Anangana. Heart-broken at the turn of events, he relinquishes his position as the head of the monastery.

and disappears, to spend his life in the company of ascetics at Girnar.

Some time later, the situation in Gujarat reaches a critical state. The exchequer is empty and the army is discontented. The King, Karnadeva, is virtually a prisoner of the minister, Madhay, who runs the state as if it were his personal property. The minister, in order to maintain his position, is already in close touch with the court of Sultan Ala-ud-Din Khalji. Only two persons are capable of saving Gujarat, thinks the patriotic minister Vana Mehta, from catastrophe—one is Bada Maharaj and the other is Malik Kafur.

Vana Mehta traces the whereabouts of Bada Maharaj from Gajanan and proceeds to Girnar to persuade him to accept the post of the Royal High Priest in place of his deceased father, as he was the only man capable of tiding over the crisis.

Malik Kafur—Kapur was his name—was originally a menial employed in the temple of Somanath. An orphan treated cruelly by a widowed aunt, he always behaved with sullen resentment. Once, Bada Maharaj, then studying in the temple, had befriended him. Goaded by the taunts of his aunt, he left her house and spurred on by his personal ambition, he utilised his good looks to establish homosexual relations with an Arab merchant and embraced Islam. Later he fell into the hands of pirates who sold him as a slave. During one of his trips to Muscat, he gained the confidence of the Sultan of that State by expert trading in Arab horses. Bada Maharaj ransomed him from slavery and brought him to Gujarat where he gained the favour of the King by securing for him some fine horses imported by his master. Very soon he became an important political figure on account of his contact with the Sultan's court at Delhi.

At this time, Ala-ud-Din Khalji usurps the throne of Delhi after assassinating his old uncle. There is the constant threat of a Mongol invasion of India and it is a golden opportunity for the rulers of Gujarat and Ranathambhor to combine against the Sultanate of Delhi. But the Rajput chiefs are torn by internal dissensions which Madhav helps to foment. Bada Maharaj and Vana Mehta find themselves helpless to retrieve this fast-deteriorating situation. They, therefore, somehow manage to get Madhav dismissed. Malik Kafur advises them to kill Madhav. The shrewd and calculating adventurer could see the potentialities for mischief, if Madhav is left alive free. But Bada Maharaj sets his face firmly against killing a Brahman like Madhav.

This little vignette highlights one of the reasons why the Hindus went down before the Muslim invaders time and again. Munshi himself in one of his speeches averred: 'We went under, because we were too humane.'

On his dismissal, Madhav runs away to the court of Ala-ud-Din Khilji and prevails upon him to invade Gujarat, promising all help. Malik Kafur sticks to Karnadeva not only because of his loyalty to Bada Maharaj but also of his ambition to save Gujarat and become its Prime Minister one day. Being a Muslim and a wellknown horse dealer, he has influential contacts with Delhi.

With the help of Madhav, the forces of Ala-ud-Din Khalji, led by Ulugh Khan and Vazier Nusrat Khan, are able to storm the fortress of Patan. Karnadeva is wounded in the battle and becomes unconscious. Kafur takes him away to safety at Khambhat. Realising that Gujarat is doomed, Kafur ingratiates himself into the favour of the invading chiefs.

In the disguise of a blind naked hermit, Bada Maharaj returns to Patan and tries to rescue the queen, Kamladevi,

with the help of Kafur who now enjoys the confidence of Ala-ud-Din's Vazier. She had been taken prisoner and has been kept with other well-born women of Gujarat, whom the Vazier intends to present to the Sultan.

When Bada Maharaj finds it impossible to rescue Kamladevi, he induces Kafur to set fire to the palace where she is kept so that she may perform *jauhar* and escape dis-honour. Kamladevi, however, is too much of a coward to put an end to her life by *jauhar* even when the opportunity is given to her. Finally she is sent to Delhi. Kafur manages to be entrusted with the responsibility of escorting her to Delhi.

Patan is now a charnel house. Madhav, who had thought of ruling over Gujarat with the help of the invaders, now sees Patan being looted and burnt. Even the women of his caste have been drowning themselves in wells to escape dishonour at the hands of the barbarian invaders.

A grim mood seizes Bada Maharaj as he sees the massacre, rapine, rape and havoc wrought in the country-side. In one of the villages, he finds that all the women had jumped into a burning temple to escape molestation. A fierce rage possesses him and he becomes the disciple of a Naga ascetic who gives him the message of unrelenting resistance.

He then goes to Karnavati where the nagarsheth, the mayor, had bought peace by paying a heavy tribute to the invaders. Bada Maharaj rouses the people to initiate a campaign of social ostracism of all who had any sort of contact with the *mlechha*. He narrowly escapes being buried to death and proceeds to Khambhat to warn Karna-deva that Nusrat Khan, the Vazier, had decided to march on Khambhat.

In the meantime, Shyamaladevi, the wife of the warden of the Khambhat fortress, is captured by the Muslims

while on her way to join her husband. She repels the amorous advances of the Muslim general, stabs him when he tries to embrace her and escapes to a forest. Bruised and unconscious, she is lying on the roadside when she is picked up by Gajanan, friend of Bada Maharaj. He is on his way to Khambhat in the company of villagers who, under the inspiration of Bada Maharaj, had burnt down their villages to defy the invader.

Shyamal is welcomed with open arms by her husband. But Bada Maharaj intervenes and prevails upon her—now that she has been polluted by the touch of the *mlechha*—to commit *jauhar*. The arguments of Bada Maharaj with Gajanan and Shyamal epitomise the philosophy of the social segregation of the *mlechha* in the interest of purity of race and culture. Shyamal, for the sake of the purity of womanhood, falls in with the proposal of Bada Maharaj and enters the sacrificial fire even as the invading armies enter Khambhat. Her heroic husband, sword in hand, falls upon the invaders only to be cut to pieces.

The women captured at Patan are sent by Vazier Nusrat Khan to Delhi with Malik Kafur in charge. Kamla-devi is among them and she enters the Sultan's harem. At Delhi, Kafur's uncanny cleverness brings him immediately to the notice of the Sultan who also falls for his homosexual seductiveness. Madhav has also come to Delhi to upbraid the Sultan for his breach of promise and to induce him to treat Gujarat mercifully. Ala-ud-Din gives him a *firman* appointing him to the Subah of Gujarat and induces him to return to Gujarat with Kafur.

When Madhav with Kafur reaches the camp of Ulugh Khan at Prabhas to claim the governorship of Gujarat, the Khalji chief declares the firman to be a forgery. This sends Madhav into a rage which upsets his mental balance. In wrath against his fate, Madhav agrees, at Ulugh Khan's

insistence, to lead the invading army to the sacred shrine of Somanath.

The last ditch resistance at the temple gates is organised by Bada Maharaj as the head of the Naga sect. The encounter is terrific. With cries of "Jaya Somanath" and "Har Har Mahadeva", the serried ranks of Naga ascetics under Bada Maharaj fight with mad frenzy and make it very difficult for the invading army to enter the temple. They were, however, no match for the superior military strength of the enemy. Under cover of darkness, however, Bada Maharaj escapes with the idol to immerse it into the sea to prevent its being desecrated.

As Madhav enters with the invaders, his son-in-law, the Governor of Prabhas, who while personally defending the fort had been seriously wounded, is in his last gasps. Recognising his father-in-law, the dying warrior manages to summon sufficient strength to spit on the face of the traitor. Just then from the pyre of innumerable women who had committed *janhar*, a hand falls out. Madhav takes it up and from the bangle recognises it as his daughter's. He goes mad; Kafur leads him away to his camp where the next day, he is seen fondling his own hand as if it were his baby daughter!

Finding the idol of Somanath removed, Malik Kafur plans the installation of a fake idol to give credit to Ulugh Khan to have emulated Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni and to have broken the idol.

Bhagna Paduka presents a poignant picture of the titanic resistance offered day after day to the Muslim invaders; of men who flung away life to preserve their freedom; of women who courted fire to escape dishonour; of children whose bodies choked wells that they might escape slavery.

Bhagawan Kautilya

Bhagawan Kautilya deals with the period just preceding Alexander's invasion of India and depicts the life in Pataliputra, the capital of Magadha, when the Nandas were the rulers. The last scene is set in Naimisharanya where the rishis dwelt. Though the threads are partly Puranic and partly historical, the development of the story is dramatic. The hero of the novel is Kautilya, also known as Chanakya or Vishnugupta, whom tradition has unjustly presented, as a hateful, crafty Machiavelli. The greatest service of Munshi has been to rescue Chanakya from this stigma and to raise him to the dignity of a sage, whose sole object was, with the aid of young Chandragupta, to save Magadha from the wicked rule of the Nandas.

Reviewing this book in the *Indian Daily Mail*, Narmadshankar D. Mehta observed: 'Mr. Munshi is not only a careful student of the human mind and its motives but is also an artistic lover of nature. His description of Naimisharanya, coupled with that of the ashram of Rishi Bhadraksha, is as picturesque as it is beautiful. The moral aim of Chanakya is revealed at the end of Chapter XXXVII in a very artistic manner: The seer (Chanakya) arose and the dream of Naimisharanya was realised. He saw the sacred symbol Om. He saw that mere asceticism without culture was useless; mere knowledge without self-control a poor exhibition. Both culture and control were linked together by the power of the concentrated thought of this seer.'

When the Nanda dynasty ruled over Magadha, they brought practically the whole of North India under their sway. Absolute power corrupts absolutely and the later Nanda Kings became pleasure-loving and they led lives of luxury. In their pride, they looked down upon all the

sacred things of life and, as a result, the Brahmans were subjected to great indignities.

When the story begins, Hiranyakupta, popularly known as Dhan Nanda, is ruling over Magadha, aided by his ministers, Rakshas, Vakranasa, Senajit and others. Acharya Sakatal, the old Prime Minister, had been dismissed by the King at the instigation of Vakranasa and deprived of all that he had. Sakatal is an erudite savant and seasoned diplomat and a worthy representative of high Brahmanical tradition at its best. But misery does not come singly and he also loses his eyesight. Bereft of power and reduced to penury, the blind Brahman is leading a wretched life, with none to care for him except his loving daughter, Gauri. The trials of this great and pious man do not end there; even his sons begin to lead disreputable lives. One of them, Stulabhadra, is openly living with Kosha, a prostitute of Pataliputra. His dismissal has also been the prelude to the persecution of Brahmans and the closing down of the houses of learning.

Senajit, the minister of Dhan Nanda, is in love with Sakatal's daughter, Gauri, and the love is reciprocated. Sakatal, however, does not look with favour on this marriage; but he has had to agree to it under royal commands. The marriage, however, is postponed to a later auspicious date.

At this time, Ambhi, the heir-apparent of Takshashila, comes to Pataliputra to visit his sister Mahadevi, who had been married to Dhan Nanda for political reasons. The queen, brought up in the cultured atmosphere of Takshashila, has never felt at home in the dissipated court of Pataliputra. She dislikes her royal husband in whose big harem she is no more than an instrument of political intrigue, doomed to live like a prisoner.

Ambhi, when he arrived in Pataliputra is accompanied by his friend, philosopher and guide, Vishnugupta, otherwise known as Chanakya, a former student of Sakatal. Dhan Nanda and his ministers sense some political motive in the visit of Ambhi and show little enthusiasm about it. The situation becomes tense, as Vishnugupta refuses to enter the city if proper honours are not done to him as a man of learning. The news of her brother's arrival reaches the queen but she has little hope of her lot improving as a result of his visit.

Dhan Nanda's ministers point out to Vishnugupta that as had been ordained by the King, he must walk the distance to the palace; no Brahman has the right to ride an elephant in Pataliputra. Vishnugupta refuses to do so and tells them that if at all he has to go on foot, he will go only to the house of his *guru*, Sakatal, and live with him. True to his word, Vishnugupta goes to the house of Sakatal and gives his *guru* the honours which others, out of craven fear of the King, had not dared to give. Soon the humble cottage of Sakatal becomes the centre of activities. Ambassadors, religious leaders and men of learning flock there to see Vishnugupta whose fame had reached their ears.

Vishnugupta collects all the threads of the complicated situation in his hands. He discovers that Chandragupta, a young prince suspected of high ambition, is a prisoner in charge of Senajit and sets about arranging his escape. He feels that Chandragupta will be an ideal colleague to bring about a new state of affairs in Magadha. The idea of avenging the insult to his *guru* is also present in his mind.

These political intrigues are further complicated by Senajit's love for Gauri. The ministers of Dhan Nanda want to get Sakatal to agree to this marriage so that the blind old statesman and seer, still a power to be reckoned

with, might not join their enemies. Senajit goes to the hut of his would-be father-in-law with the high hope that because of his high political status and Gauri's love for him, things would work out smoothly and an early date for the marriage will be fixed.

Sakatal had never been happy about the proposed marriage, but he had been helpless so far; now Vishnugupta has brought him a new hope. Vishnugupta's popularity and the respect he commands also begin to have an effect on Gauri who is attracted by his fascinating personality. There is a conflict in her mind. To be the wife of a great political personage, achieve worldly position and live in luxury or to be the wife of an ascetic Brahman whose only wealth was his learning and to lead a life of austerity and self-denial?

Gauri hears Vishnugupta and her father holding discussions during the long hours of the night on various subjects. The dormant spiritual ideals within her begin to assert themselves. She begins to dream of a life that will be cheerfully sanctioned by her father and by the sages of old. One night, she hears her father unburdening to Vishnugupta his unhappiness at the prospect of his daughter marrying Senajit. She also hears her father requesting Vishnugupta to marry her and Vishnugupta agreeing to the proposal. She is confused and cannot decide what would make her happy.

Gauri has a talk with Vishnugupta who however does not mince matters. He tells her: "If you are inspired by love, if you desire wealth, power and luxury, and if you are hurt at breaking your promise to Senajit, go and marry him. But if you desire to be the equal of the great wives of the sages of old, be my companion in all that I do. This will be my *gurudakshina* to my *guru* to whom I have not been able to give anything so far." The problem of Gauri

is whom to select as a husband, the man of learning and poverty or of valour and deeds. To yield to love or to the old tradition? She remembers the fascination she feels for Vishnugupta; at the same time, she cannot forget how deeply Senajit loves her.

When Senajit meets Sakatal, the latter, not to break his promise, dictates to him the terms for Gauri's marriage to him. He asks him to get the permission of the King for him to leave for Naimisharanya on the day following the marriage. Senajit agrees to get the royal sanction.

Pataliputra hums with political activities. The ministers, Vakranasa, Rakshas, Darshaka and others have their plans which however are frustrated when Vishnugupta contrives the escape of Chandragupta from the custody of Senajit. Events inexorably move towards a climax.

The King and his ministers are seriously disturbed at the activities of Ambhi and Vishnugupta and want to get rid of Ambhi by sending him away. The King even accedes to Ambhi's request to allow his sister, the queen, to accompany him.

In honour of Ambhi's visit, a banquet is arranged. During the feast, news comes that the hut of Sakatal is on fire. The news was not unexpected as the minister himself had ordered the hut to be set on fire in order to get rid of Vishnugupta.

Vishnugupta however had come to know of the plot in advance and had already left the house for the assembly. When the King discovers that Vishnugupta is at the banquet, he flies into a rage and catches him by his matted locks which get dishevelled. Vishnugupta's anger knows no bounds. He takes the vow, famous in Indian tradition, not to tie up his dishevelled locks till the Nandas have been exterminated.

Gauri learns that her house has caught fire and accepts as true the report that her father and Vishnugupta have been burnt to death. She suspects Senajit of having done this deed; and in utter disgust, she leaves for Naimisharanya, the abode of the sages, where her relatives live.

In the confusion that follows the break-up of the feast, Vishnugupta, accompanied by Ambhi, also leaves for Naimisharanya.

Dhan Nanda, who is furious, wants to follow them. He is however persuaded by his ministers not to do so and Senajit is entrusted with the task of capturing Chandragupta and Vishnugupta and of bringing them back. Senajit is also determined to take his vengeance on Vishnugupta who has disgraced him by contriving the escape of Chandragupta and stealing his bride-elect.

Then follows the most picturesque part of the book in which the sacred forest of Naimisharanya and the life led by the rishis in their ashrams is described. The guardian sage of this forest is Veda Vyasa, the author of *Mahabharata*. Vishnugupta, when he arrives there, seeks the inspiration of Vyasa by meditating on him at a spot where his sandals have been enshrined. Vyasa appears before Vishnugupta and entrusts him with the mission of redeeming Aryavarta from the bondage of the Nandas. Senajit, who is at the time standing behind Vishnugupta in order to kill him, sees the vision of Vyasa and hears the mission with which his enemy is charged. Seeing him in a proper light which he had failed to do so far, he throws away the sword with which he had intended to kill him.

Vishnugupta, when he rises from his meditation, seeks the collaboration of Senajit in the fulfilment of his mission and brings about the marriage of Senajit and Gauri.

News is brought of the invasion of the country by Alexander.

It is obvious that Munshi intended *Bhagawan Kautilya* to be the first of a series depicting Magadha of the Mauryas and Alexander's invasion of India. It is hoped that he will find time to complete the series and give us, as he alone can, a full length picture of one of the greatest epochs of ancient India.

Dhruvaswaminidevi

Dhruvaswaminidevi is a drama in four acts. The plot is reconstructed from the fragments of *Devichandraguptam* of Visakhadatta recovered by Sylvian Levi. It deals with the interregnum between Samudragupta's death in 380 A.D. and the accession of Chandragupta II Vikramaditya during which the latter's elder brother, Ramagupta, reigned.

The age of the Imperial Guptas is justly reckoned as the Golden Age of India. Life and culture, science and letters flourished as never before. Chandragupta I was the founder of the empire. His son, Samudragupta, was one of the most brilliant conquerors in history. Vincent Smith calls him "the Indian Napoleon". Samudragupta subdued most of the Kings in the country in a whirlwind campaign, restored *dharma* in Aryavarta, performed an *aswamedha* and assumed the title of Dharmaditya.

Historians have generally accepted that Samudragupta was succeeded by his more brilliant son, Chandragupta II. According to Visakhadatta's *Devichandraguptam*, Rama-gupta succeeded Samudragupta and very nearly brought the Gupta empire to the verge of disaster. Munshi, however, has added his distinctive and characteristic touches to Visakhadatta's story. *Dhruvaswaminidevi* recaptures the glory of the Gupta age, associated with romance, song

and fable and linked with the memories of Yajnavalkya and Kalidasa.

The majestic heroine, every inch a queen, with her noble steadfastness and devoted loyalty is a powerfully drawn character. Her patriotism, her faith in the mission of the Mahabhagwat Guptas and her noble resignation as the empress, first of the wicked Ramagupta and then of Vikramaditya, are brought out in vivid colours. From the drama emerges a Homeric figure cast in everlasting marble.

Ramagupta is a disgrace to the Gupta dynasty. Munshi has succeeded admirably in etching a worthless and dissolute character whose philosophy of life is based on a supreme contempt for all high values.

In shining contrast stands his younger brother, Chandragupta. Every word and gesture of his is heroic. Imbued with a sense of his imperial mission, Chandragupta bestrides the play like a Colossus.

The play opens in the garden of the Queen's palace in Kusumpur, the capital of the Magadha empire. Dhruvadevi, the Queen, is leading the secluded life of an ascetic. She is disgusted with her husband, Ramagupta, who leads a dissolute life and tortures her by laughing at her high ideals. Kalidasa, as yet showing little signs of his future greatness, compares her to the pale moon at break of day. News comes that Mahakshatrap Rudradaman, the King of Saurashtra, has invaded Ujjain. Emperor Ramagupta is entreated by his queen and by his younger brother, Chandragupta, to lead the Gupta forces against the invader. But he laughs at their heroic sentiment, cracks ribald jokes at the glory of the Guptas. He is immersed in his personal pleasures and would not be bothered with defending his empire. Chandragupta forces his brother to accompany him to Ujjain, as the morale of the armies

cannot be sustained without the presence of the Emperor. Dhruvadevi volunteers to accompany them.

The Gupta forces are defeated and Rudradaman, as the victor, demands a heavy indemnity in territory, horses and gold coins. He then sees Dhruvadevi and, smitten by her great beauty, offers to waive all his demands if she is given to him. Everyone is shocked at the audacious suggestion. But not Ramagupta. He had little love for his empress and was sick of her for constantly reminding him that, as a scion of the Gupta dynasty, it was his duty to interest himself in affairs of State. He, therefore, cheerfully agrees to Rudradaman's demand. All the Gupta leaders, with Chandragupta at their head, are disgusted at this infamous conduct of their Emperor who, however, laughs at them for what he calls their "stupid heroics". Ultimately, to save Dhruvadevi and the empire from dis-honour, Chandragupta disguises himself as a woman and is taken to the tent of the enemy where he kills Rudradaman. In the ensuing battle, the invading forces are routed. Chandragupta himself is severely wounded.

Ramagupta returns to Kusumpur and is irrepressibly contemptuous of his empress and his brother whom he suspects of mutual attachment. Chandragupta, who suspects his brother of a design to kill him, feints madness. He also toys with the idea of becoming initiated as a Buddhist monk. Before making the final decision, he goes to meet Dhruvadevi and both discover that they love each other. Ramagupta surprises them and orders the death of Chandragupta whom he so enrages that he strangles the emperor on the spot. The Royal Court had been sick to death of the emperor and proclaims Chandragupta the successor.

The empire is in confusion. Taking advantage of this situation, the Mahakshatras join hands with the Vakataka King and invade the Gupta territory, inflicting a severe

defeat upon the Gupta armies. Chandragupta leaves for the battlefield to rescue the situation. In the meantime, the people of Kusumpur are infuriated against Dhruvadevi. They consider her a woman of ill-omen, responsible for the madness of Chandragupta and for the death of Ramagupta. Chandragupta's step-brother, Skandagupta, leads the mob to the royal palace in order to get at the unhappy empress.

While the populace is storming the gates of the royal palace, Chandragupta, after having inflicted a smashing defeat on the enemy, unexpectedly returns to the capital, and, unseen, enters the palace to meet the unhappy Dhruvadevi. Both feel that their last hour has come, for the populace is blood-thirsty. Therefore, they take the advice of Yajnavalkya, the author of the *Smriti*, who unites them in wedlock. The next moment the palace gates give way and the mob rushes into the presence of Dhruvadevi with murderous designs. Chandragupta stands between her and the blood-thirsty mob, which is surprised to see him in the palace. He announces to them how he overcame the foreign invaders and how Dhruvadevi was his empress. The mood of the mob suddenly changes. From execrations it changes to shouts of victory and the mob accepts Dhruvadevi as the empress of their beloved young emperor.

In this play, Ramagupta and Chandragupta II, the old general and Rudradaman, Dutta Devi, the venerable old Queen-mother and the greatest of them, Dhruvadevi, emerge each as a character in his or her own right, vividly sketched on the background of a forgotten but glorious past.

CHAPTER IX

AN EPIC OF THE ANCIENT ARYANS I

Among Munshi's many writings in Gujarati, pride of place must be given to the series of plays and novels which form a significant whole and constitute what may be termed, without any exaggeration, 'An Epic of the Ancient Aryans'. All these works are based on legendary lore; they are, however, not mere echoes of time-honoured stories and myths, but significant interpretations of mighty events and incidents. Pre-historic India pulses and throbs in these pages and the breath of modernity which has been blown into them by the author renders them fresh to us and to those who will succeed us. This is why this series is easily the finest of Munshi's literary achievements. It may well be called his magnum opus. No apology then is needed for offering a detailed analysis of it with suitable comments. The fragrance of the past is like that of crushed roses. We have a strong whiff of it here—Editors

This series of play and novels is woven out of episodes which were traditional even in the period of the *Mahabharata* and the *Puranas* and forms a single epic dealing with the life and achievements of heroes and heroines familiar to the Vedic and pre-Vedic periods. Its central thread is provided by the achievements of three great families of Rishis. The first is that of the Bhrigus, the priest-warriors who were associated with the *Atharva-veda*, and who claimed descent from Bhrigu, the sage who brought down fire on earth. The other two families were

descended respectively from Vasishtha and Vishvamitra, two celebrated Vedic Rishis who fought in the *Dasarajna*, the Battle of the Ten Kings, referred to in the *Rigveda Samhita*. The life of Vishvamitra, the noblest of the Vedic sages, forms the connecting theme of most of these works.

Many authors, ancient, mediaeval and modern, have written about one or another member of these great families and have woven fresh stories out of their traditional exploits. Munshi, however, has trodden new ground. He has not relied on the *Puranas* for character and atmosphere, but has gone back to the original source, the *Rigveda Samhita*. Here, too, his creative touch is evident. By relying upon a few synchronisms and by supplying various imaginative touches, he has produced out of scattered episodes, a smooth narrative, which, in the guise of romance, gives us a panoramic view of the Aryan advance from the Punjab to the Narmada in the age which preceded those of the *Brahmanas* and the *Mahabharata*. In creating so unfamiliar an atmosphere as the Rigvedic, it is inevitable that some obscurity should creep in. But that is part of the charm which is provided by a portrayal of the remote past.

Part One deals with the mythic times of the Vedic eras, when Gods, men and Danavas or titans, met and mingled. Parts Two and Three are concerned with the Vedic and the beginning of the Epic periods.

The first part consists of three plays, *Putra Samovadi* (Like Unto a Son), *Purandara Parajaya* (Conquest of Indra) and *Avibhakta Atma* (Undivided Soul).

The second part consists of four plays, *Vishvaratha*, *Shambar Kanya*, *Deve Didheli* and *Vishvamitra Rishi*; and a novel *Lomaharshini*.

The third part consists of a novel, *Bhagawan Parashurama* and a play, *Tarpana* (The Obsequial Offering).

Most of the material from which the author has created his fabric was collected by him when he was preparing his research lectures on the 'Early Aryans of the West Coast', which he delivered under the auspices of the Bombay University in 1938.

Putra Samovadi

Dramatisation of any mythological theme is fraught with great difficulty for divine honour paid for ages to the great heroes has removed from them all traces of human weakness and their reappearance with human attributes only makes the situation melodramatic rather than realistic. In *Putra Samovadi*, Munshi has achieved considerable success; the characters are well delineated and the situations deftly handled. The familiar episode of Shukracharya and Devayani, as retold by Munshi, makes fascinating reading.

It is the dawn of the mythic age in the springtide of the world. Men, the descendants of Manu, wander over the earth, fighting amongst themselves or with the Danavas or titans of the Nether World. The Devas, those shining Gods who live upon the summits of the golden-hued mountains, also wage unceasing war with the Danavas.

Shukracharya, the High-Priest of Vrishaparvan, king of the Danavas of the Nether World, and son of the ancient sage Bhrigu, is a master of *Sanjivani*, the magic incantation which restores the dead to life. Kach, son of Brihaspati, the High Priest of the Gods, comes to the ashram of Shukracharya and meets his daughter Devayani, golden-hued, stalwart and beautiful, clad in deer-skin and armed with bows and arrows. Kach tells her who he is and why

he has come to Shukracharya to study. He describes to her the lofty palaces of the Gods.

KACH (smiling): Your mind cannot picture the splendour of our palaces. You must see them for yourself. In the land from which I come, a damsel such as you would not stir from her jewelled couch.

DEVAYANI (with contempt): I wonder how your maidens endure their lives. Such an existence would irk me beyond measure.

KACH: We have music, songs, dances, and floral festivals to keep them happy.

DEVAYANI (enthusiastically): I should love to see the palaces I told my father that we should have a palace here.

KACH: Then?

DEVAYANI Father said "No, independence can only be preserved in a hut. In a palace, there is helplessness—always."

Kach falls in love with Devayani, but trembles at the prospect of facing the mighty Shukracharya. When he sees the sage approaching, he says: "The Master comes! The body which laughs at age; those locks which rival the lion's mane; the forehead reflecting heaven's profundity; the body which stands erect like Mount Kailasa. Even the God of death, the fearful Yama, can neither terrify nor kill him but steals away from his presence, like a frightened child."

Shukracharya accepts Kach, son of his co-pupil of early days, now the Master, his rival, Brihaspati, as his disciple.

Then comes to the master, Vrishaparvan, king of the Danavas, tall, dark and strong, with a crown of peacock feathers on his head and a sword in his hand. The sage tells him of his new pupil. The king, however, is

suspicious of the presence of the son of his bitterest enemy in their midst. Shukracharya, however, is firm; the vows of the learned are strict; no aspirant for learning could be turned away. Says he:

"Why are you frightened. What can this boy do? And how unreal would be our strength, if a mere boy can break it?"

Vrishaparvan conveys to the sage the message of peace sent by Indra, lord of the Gods. Vrika, son of Vrishaparvan, also tells him that the people are tired of the long war they have been waging.

SHUKRACHARYA : Weakness enters in our camp whenever Indra sends his message of peace. Then you begin to feel tired of war. And no sooner you feel tired, than Indra begins to win. It is the same old story, year after year, age after age. But does he grow tired of wars when you send him a message of peace?

VRIKA: But Gods are different. They are protected by the thunderbolt.

SHUKRACHARYA (with scorn): It is protection that turns life into a graveyard. Helplessness is born of it. You lose even the dignity which the stillness of death confers upon you. My boy, frustration spreads its net around when life is well protected. I ask you: What protection does your father want? Who protected your ancestors? Who protects me, year after year? Child, it is the man of little faith who needs protection.

Shukracharya then tells Vrika how his ancestor fell from their high estate.

SHUKRACHARYA. Listen, Vrika. Learn what I say and forget it not. Your ancestors lived in the shade of beautiful forests and on the cool heights of mountain tops. As the sun rose, they went out to hunt. When the moon rose, they danced with joy unbounded. Vrika, what

a life that was! Life was wonderful, for they were without fear. No one had taught hypocrisy in the name of morals. No one had invented a heaven as a reward to virtue. No one heeded to know how to pacify a tyrant with a smile. No one had thought that freedom was unrighteous. No one had made weakness attractive by calling it loyalty and devotion. But then came the messenger of Brihaspati, master of crafty words, and he spread the magic web of words. Then did your ancestors, with their simple minds and easy temper, lose their freedom, and losing it they fell. Better to die than to live under protection. Ponder over what I have told you. Let your head touch the sky. Let your proud mien frighten the Gods. He who bends is broken.

Devayani comes to the sage, after the king of the Danavas and his son have left. She is already in love with Kach. The wise Shukracharya warns her against her feelings which makes her unhappy. Lacking a son, he knows that after him there will be no one to inherit his courage and message of life, and he tells her of his grief. Devayani assures him that she will be as good as a son.

SHUKRACHARYA: Child, a daughter belongs to her lord. When the husband enters your life, the father will no more be needed. He will be but a chattel to be thrown away. Then the hopes and joys of your husband will be yours. You will be happy in his happiness, wretched in his misery. Alive, I will lose the mainstay of life, dead, my message will be lost to the world. When I grow weak and helpless, no son of mine will inspire me with the message which I taught him. When I die, no son of mine will call the world to the battle of freedom beneath my banner.

DEVAYANI (with shining eyes) : No, No, father You

are the author of my being, my teacher, my God. You have brought me up in love, inspired me with your life's message. Your name and prowess are mine. Your friends are mine. Your foes also shall be mine. Your words shall be my law; to fulfil your hopes, my only goal. Freedom Incarnate, the memory of your mighty deeds shall be the breath of my life. (Then, looking at the mountain-tops where dwell the Gods, she exclaims defiantly). Listen, Indra; listen, Brihaspati! From to-day, Shukracharya is no longer without a son. I am he.

The trembling Kach hears these words from a distance and turns pale with fear; for, his father has laid his commands on him to marry Devayani and bring her with him to heaven.

KACH (to himself): Oh! Lord of the Gods, have I to make this woman my wedded mate? But then, I know the sky will crack; the earth will sink; and heaven itself will be a wilderness.

Though Devayani is madly in love with Kach, Vrishaparvan and his men have not outgrown their distrust of this enemy in their midst. They, therefore, decide to kill him, but every time he is killed, Devayani implores her father to restore him to life, and he does so

The titans, however, know that Shukracharya can restore anyone to life, but not, if on his coming to life, the sage himself is killed. So they cut Kach to pieces, cook his flesh and give it as food to the sage himself.

Devayani, the fiery woman, cannot find Kach and calls upon her father to bring him to life. Shukracharya refuses to do so, saying, "Kach is the son of my bitterest enemy."

Devayani upbraids Shukracharya for his heartlessness. Unable to resist the wishes of his wilful daughter, he with his magic power calls upon Kach to reply from

wherever he may be. Kach replies that he is in the stomach of the sage himself; he cannot come out of it unless the master permits him to break open his stomach.

Shukracharya refuses to destroy himself for the benefit of his enemy's son. Devayani is furious. She implores her father to teach *Sanjivani* to Kach and to let him come out breaking open the stomach of the sage. When once he comes out alive, she says, with his knowledge of the magic incantation, he will restore Shukracharya to life. She storms, she upbraids, she beseeches her father on bended knees. The sage, Shukracharya, is adamant. Never, never, would he place *Sanjwani*, the source of invincibility with which he has invested the Danavas, in the keeping of his enemy's son.

DEVAYANI: Master of knowledge, you call yourself a true Brahman; yet you are afraid of teaching your pupil! Is this your love for your child?—for your pupil? I would sooner throw myself down from yonder mountain-top and rejoin my mother in the other world than continue to be the daughter of such a father.

SHUKRACHARYA (bitterly) : Do as you please · destroy me and my race. Shukracharya has not the heart to make you unhappy; he loves you so. Go, disgrace of my family! Destroy by all means my triumph and my strength. O, Brihaspati, I concede you victory. I am giving back your son his life. Kach, learn the *Sanjivani*:

'Fear not,

Retreat not,

Surrender not,

Fight always.

In defeat and in triumph—

In life or in death,

In this world and in the next.'

Kach masters the incantation and emerges from

Shukracharya's stomach, leaving the sage dead. Kach, having gained the purpose of his mission, desires to return to his people. Shukracharya is dead and he is no more concerned with him. But Devayani turns upon him with the fury of a tigress and demands that her father be restored to life. He hesitates to revive the master. Devayani angrily demands immediate compliance with her wishes. Kach, afraid of her, recites the *Sanjivani*, and Shukracharya is restored to life. After the sage departs, Kach expresses his gratefulness to Devayani.

KACH. You are my *Sanjivani*. But for you, I would have been dead.

DEVAYANI: Kach, I cannot live without you. You are the son of Brihaspati, the lord of speech. I am the daughter of Shukracharya, the lord of life. You are speech; I am action. Come, let us go to father and ask his blessings. Our marriage will be the union of heaven and earth.

Kach is happy at the prospect of marrying Devayani, and invites her to marry him and go with him to the Land of the Gods in the way of a dutiful wife.

DEVAYANI (with blazing eyes): Go to the Land of the Gods! Do you intend to make the daughter of Shukracharya the daughter-in-law of Brihaspati and drag her to the king of the Gods. You have now mastered the *Sanjivani*. Kach, my darling, why don't you keep both *Sanjivani* and Devayani? Dearest! Come! I will give you such happiness as no woman ever gave to man. In my arms you will not think of the Land of the Gods. Listening to my passionate words you will forget the songs of the *Gandharvas*. You will be the principal disciple of Shukracharya. You will be greater than your father, both in learning and in speech.

KACH (surprised): Devayani, don't be obstinate.

I belong to the Land of the Gods. The preceptor of the Gods is my father. The king of the Gods is my master.

DEVAYANI: The king of the Gods—your master! Kach, you are a noble Brahman, and Shukracharya's disciple. Will you sell your soul to the lord of the Gods; forget the message of freedom which your *guru* taught you and prostrate yourself before Indra? You are the first among those who neither bend nor disgrace the lord of *Sanjivani*—the highest among immortals who neither serve nor are served. And still you speak these words?

KACH (determined): Brihaspati's son will obey his father's mandate and will follow in his footsteps.

DEVAYANI (making a passionate appeal): Kach, dearest, you are both learned and ambitious. There, you will only be the son of the High-Priest, an ornament of Indra's court. Here, you will be my master, my father's strength and the preceptor of Vrishaparvan. Are you still dissatisfied? Then come with me. Let us go to my father. We three will embark on adventures which the worlds have never seen before. We shall destroy the fortress of heaven and humble the pride of the king of the Gods. Triumphant over the three worlds, we shall live among the stars. By the message of our life, we shall uplift the Gods, the Danavas and the mortals. We shall purge their hearts of fear and faint-heartedness, make them proud and self-confident.

As she speaks, Devayani stands erect, proud, resplendent, her breasts heaving. Then, with a powerful and meaningful glance, she calls upon him to obey: "I have made you the master of my heart, the master of the life-giving message of my father and myself."

Kach is overawed. He bows his head and admits defeat.

KACH: Devayani, I cannot accept your invitation.

You are not a woman; you are an immortal. I have been mistaken in you. Your flaming body is not meant for the embrace of a lover. It has the radiance of a Goddess. Your soul is not that of a woman who can serve her husband. It is all lightning and fire; it is world-destroying. I dare not accept you.

DEVAYANI (with wounded pride): What is it that you want? Is there no other way of my marrying you without betraying my father?

KACH (humbly): Strike me, Devayani, if you will. But I cannot marry you, though I shall worship you all my life. In my heart lives the eternal desire of the mere man to make my life my own. I need a mate who will merge her life in mine, accept me and my work with no reserve; be my joy when I am happy, my solace when I am grief-laden. I want a wife who will worship me and who herself will be proud of being the daughter-in-law of Brihaspati; who will become the mother of my worshipping children, whom she will bring up to be madly proud of me and my august father and of his glory and mine. You are an elemental creature. How can you be trapped in a domestic net? How can you, Devayani, be the daughter-in-law of Brihaspati? How can I expect you to accept Brihaspati's commands?

Suddenly, Devayani realises the difference between a son and a daughter.

DEVAYANI (proudly): Save me from your kind words. But remember this: you lack the courage to marry the daughter of Shukracharya. Go! Tell all who live in the Land of the Gods that Devayani is no longer the daughter of Shukracharya. She is like unto a son to him, ambitious to destroy the pride of the Gods.

When Kach takes leave of Shukracharya to return to

his own land, she gives him her last message in the hearing of her father.

DEVAYANI: Tell your father that he cannot win the daughter of Shukracharya by exchanging such a son as you. Go.

SHUKRACHARYA (proudly): And tell your father also, Kach, that Shukracharya is now no longer without a son.

* * *

The final stage of the war between the Danavas and the Gods begins. The Danavas have lost all confidence, for they love peace 'the peace that defeats men, that turns a mighty hero into a worm,' as Shukracharya puts it.

By her valour, Devayani has already become a terror to the Gods. Now she decides to secure the help of Yayati, king of men, who had rescued her when she had been thrown into a well by Sharmishta, daughter of Vrishaparvan; king of the Danavas. She exercises her womanly arts on him so that he may bring his huge army to the help of the Danavas.

DEVAYANI: King I am a hermit's daughter, wild and wayward, and I know not the blandishments of sophisticated girls. I cannot say who will be my master, but every evening I climb yonder hilltop; stand and stare at the wide expanse of waters, waiting, waiting, for my master. (She adds, with eyes half-closed:) I see my lord; he is unique, handsome as the God of love, valorous as the God of war, loving as your grandfather, Pururavas. An earth-shaker, he will be the support of the helpless; a world-conqueror, he will subdue all the three worlds.

Inspired by these fiery words, Yayati longs to conquer the three worlds with Devayani by his side. Slowly,

imperceptibly, she plays on his feelings until he offers her his hand in marriage.

YAYATI: Dearest, I now understand the meaning of all things. Why was I born? So that I may get you as my wife and be the lord of the three worlds. You have awakened the sleeping purpose of my life.

Yayati, spell-bound by the beauty and passion of Devayani, marries her. But he is human: he wishes to go to Nandanvan for the honeymoon. Devayani has other ideas.

DEVAYANI: How can we enjoy each other's company when we have not occupied Indra's throne?

She takes her husband away from pleasures; she also takes with her, as a slave, Sharmishta, the daughter of the Danava King, Vrishaparvan. This is Devayani's punishment for the girl who had once thrown her into a well while playing.

* * *

Fifteen years pass by. Driven by Devayani, Yayati has waged incessant war against the Gods. In these unending campaigns, his only comfort has been Sharmishta, whose little home was a nest of peace and love for him, where unknown to Devayani, he often steals his way. He loves Sharmishta.

YAYATI (to Sharmishta): Dear, you are the sole refuge of my restless soul. Here, in this hut, with you by my side, I am no longer a warrior struggling perpetually to capture Indra's throne. I love this humble but peaceful home. Here, waiting for me, are you, my beloved. Here also is my universe of peace, tiny though it is, and of that universe you are the presiding Goddess.

Yayati, a mortal, is tired of continuous struggling. One day, searching for her husband, Devayani stumbles upon this spot and finds him in the company of the hated

Sharmishta and her sons. She is furious and bitterly upbraids both him and Sharmishta and sends for Shukracharya. Sharmishta throws herself at the sage's feet and begs for Yayati's life.

SHARMISHTA (piteously) : Merciful! Have pity on me. Do not do anything to him. If you must punish, I am here willing to suffer for him. Reduce my children to ashes, if you like, Gurudeva, but spare him. Oh! Devayani, I have taken nothing from you that was yours. Let him go free; let him not die: I shall be your debtor all my life.

Devayani wants her father to curse Sharmishta, but the wise sage does not listen to her.

SHUKRACHARYA (proudly) : I am not surprised that the hot-blooded Yayati prefers the healing love of Sharmishta to your fierce, all-consuming company.

The sage, however, lays upon Yayati the curse that he be an old man for the rest of his life. Yayati, shocked at the terrible prospect of endless old age, becomes dumb with despair.

SHUKRACHARYA (to the broken-hearted Devayani) : You are a young ascetic, and you have yet to reach your goal. You are still full of fight. And if mental conflicts seize you, who would be there to help me? And who would help me to destroy the foundations of Indra's power?

Yayati, now a very old man, trembling in every limb, wants his youth back. Humbly, he asks the sage to make him young again.

YAYATI: Give me back my youth. Give me back my strength, my powers, my warm blood, my iron muscles. The zest of life has not yet left me. My desires have not had their fill. How can I bear the burden of old age?

He piteously appeals to the sage who ultimately re-

lents. He modifies his curse: if any of his sons is prepared to take over the weight of age which he has imposed, Yayati would be young again. Devayani feels humiliated to see the depths to which her husband can sink Sharmishta, whose love for Yayati is unbounded, however, persuades her son Puru to take upon himself the curse of age. As a result, Puru is transformed into an old man while Yayati becomes young again.

Once Yayati has regained his youth, Devayani becomes even more relentless.

DEVAYANI: King, you who have conquered this world must now conquer the other two worlds.

YAYATI (timidly): Again you ask from me the same thing. No sooner have I become young again than I must go about conquering.

DEVAYANI (sternly). Come. The towers of heaven invite me and our army awaits your return.

YAYATI. Devayani! Elemental spirit! I am tired, very tired. You never rest, and allow no one else to rest.

However, he bows to her wishes.

The Danavas and men, led by Yayati, Devayani and Vrishaparvan, storm the abode of the Gods. Yayati is now anxious to ascend the throne of Indra, the king of the Gods, and leads the attack. He is in ecstasies at the prospect of occupying the heavenly throne. Devayani comes and tells him Shukracharya's wishes

DEVAYANI: Shatter Indra's throne and give every hero a piece of it. Grind his thunderbolt into dust and mix it with the earth. Make one world out of heaven, the earth and the nether regions. Let Gods, Danavas, and men be equal and free, walking hand in hand.

Yayati, now full of ambition, is angry. He has not conquered Indra in order to destroy the dignity which the Gods enjoyed. He thinks the Master has grown too

old to appreciate his ambition, and declines to obey the sage's advice.

Devayani attempts to appease him.

DEVAYANI: Son of man, have patience. Do not find fault with the Master, grey with the experience of ages. Do you think that this triumph has been achieved by your valour?

Vrishaparvan is also anxious to wreak his vengeance on the Gods and Yayati is impatient to seat himself on Indra's throne.

YAYATI: If we smash the throne, where shall we sit?

DEVAYANI: On plain level ground, where there is no difference between high and low.

YAYATI: Shall we not sit on this throne?

DEVAYANI: No, king, no. From the throne have flowed streams of cruelty and oppression. Age after age, those who have sat on it have offered favours and spread corruption, insisted on subservience and increased helplessness, spread terror and caused fear.

But Yayati's vanity is unbounded.

YAYATI: I have won Indra's throne by my valour, and I shall sit on it. I wish to wield the thunderbolt. The three worlds shall worship me, so I will it. If you do not wish to share my glory with me, I shall invite Shar-mishta to do so. And, of course, there is always Indra's queen, wedded to the heavenly throne.

Devayani laughs at Yayati in contempt.

Vrishaparvan also wants to occupy the land of the Gods but Yayati, the conqueror, wants Vrishaparvan to go back and live in the Nether World, his proper home. A quarrel ensues between the erstwhile allies and Yayati hurls Vrishaparvan into the Nether World.

Yayati then seats himself on the eternal throne of the Gods.

YAYATI (to himself) : To rule the world as I wish, to shape life as I desire, to receive the devotion of millions: these privileges only such as I can enjoy. Ancestors mine! Look down from your abode on high. My fame shall immortalise your exploits.

Then Indra is brought before Yayati as a prisoner.

YAYATI (proudly). Go, and, with your Gods, live in the Nether World. Vrishaparvan is dead, and his throne is vacant there. I shall protect you, and, in return, you will serve me.

INDRA (sternly) : We seek no protection by service. We accept no help from anyone but ourselves.

Naturally, Yayati is angry and threatens to destroy Indra

INDRA (proudly) : You cannot kill me.

YAYATI (in a threatening tone) : This throne is now mine.

INDRA (proudly) : The throne belongs to him who is strong enough to sit on it

YAYATI: This thunderbolt is mine.

INDRA The weapon is for him who is fearless.

YAYATI (angrily) : Am I afraid?

Indra wrenches the thunderbolt from Yayati's hands. Yayati, frightened, conceals himself behind the throne. Indra threatens to destroy him.

INDRA: Vain man, do you think that we were vanquished by you and your armies? Fool! We were subdued by the mighty will of Shukracharya—his will to conquer.

Indra hurls Yayati down to earth.

Vrishaparvan lies in a valley of the Nether World, among the rotting corpses of men and demons. Yayati is also there, lying on the ground unconscious. Devayani

is moving about on the battle-field, cursing the cowardice which would not accept the strength of Shukracharya.

YAYATI (slowly opens his eyes and looks round) : Devayani is there ! Am I dreaming ? Yes, yes, I am dreaming. That terrible woman, my wife, went away with her father. She could not have returned here. Indra, have mercy on me !

DEVAYANI : I have not come to you. Indra flung you down from heaven and cast you at my feet. What can I do ? (Sorrowfully) : Oh, king ! Even the memory of a brave struggle puts you in this ignoble fright. Let me tell you : I will not ask you to fight again, to regain your manhood, to preserve your independence. Go back to your earth. Begin to prostrate yourself before the Gods. Invoke Indra's name ceaselessly with upraised hands. And with tearful eyes beseech the favour of the Gods in heaven. Destroy yourself till not even the spirit of a worm is left in you. Once you had hopes to occupy Indra's throne, but now as you pray to him, you, wretch, will receive his gracious favours. Then your God will give you enough food to live; enough strength to serve him; enough happiness to keep you from committing suicide. And when he gives you what is already yours, accept it with folded hands; bless his name, so that he has made you no more miserable than you are.

YAYATI (meekly) : I am meek; I am a servant of my God. His mercy is my only strength. His will be done.

In the meantime, Indra arrives and wishes to embrace his grand-daughter Devayani. She resists

DEVAYANI : Stand aside. You are the lord and master of the subservient. Embrace me only when you come as my grandfather, not now. At this moment, when

we are laying the foundations of freedom for the oppressed, you shall not touch the daughter of Shukracharya.

Shukracharya appears from behind a rock. Indra invites Shukracharya to his festival of victory.

SHUKRACHARYA (laughs, and tells Indra): Indra, if you think I will join you, you are mistaken.

INDRA (prostrating himself): The son of the great Bhrigu may be pleased.

SHUKRACHARYA: My son, shall I give you a blessing—that your throne will exist no more and that your thunderbolt be broken to bits? But you will not like to have it.

Indra tosses his head proudly and asserts that no one in the three worlds can resist his might. Shukracharya remains unmoved by Indra's triumph.

SHUKRACHARYA: I know that in the three worlds no one dares to face you. So I shall not come with you. I shall come to you only when you are no longer on your throne, no longer in possession of your thunderbolt. Till then I shall not be with you.... Indra, the worlds which are yours today shall be mine tomorrow. You have conquered everything else but I am unconquerable. Wherever I tread, power is born. Wherever my voice is heard, there resounds the voice of freedom.

INDRA (surprised): But you are alone!

DEVAYANI: Lord of Gods, there is but one Lord of Light, one source of the mighty which inspires and uplifts.

Indra, however, tries to persuade Shukracharya to let his grand-daughter, Devayani, at least, come with him.

DEVAYANI: I shall only serve the Master, the noblest fighter of them all. I shall stand by his side, the side of him who breaks the bonds of the subservient. I shall inspire the slaves to revolt, the cowards to fight and the lowly to take the place of their masters.

Indra persists. He says that it is no use Devayani following her father. She is the wife of Yayati, and she will go, on death, to the abode of Yayati's ancestors. She will not be able to be with her father after his death.

SHUKRACHARYA: You are right.

DEVAYANI (anxiously): What does my mother's father say?

SHUKRACHARYA: Child, your grandfather is right. I cannot tie you down to me. When you die, you will have to go to your husband's ancestors, not mine.

DEVAYANI (shocked): Father, shall I not be with you and your fathers?

INDRA (beseechingly): Master, leave her behind.

SHUKRACHARYA: Devayani, what is your wish?

INDRA: It is not a matter of her wish.

DEVAYANI (proudly raising her head): Wait, grandfather, (with a touch of anger), I shall see how my husband's ancestors can separate me from my father. Father, I shall be with you in this world and in the next. (With a visionary look.) Before me I see the world's freedom and joy. Let us harvest these while there is time.

She places her hand on Shukracharya's shoulder.

SHUKRACHARYA: Come, then, my child, let us begin our pilgrimage. How can the ancestors fetter us when even the powers of the three worlds cannot hold us in thrall? And, child, if need be, we shall create a new heaven for ourselves and for the workers of the world's freedom.

The father and the daughter who was like unto a son to him, begin their pilgrimage together. The shadows disappear in the moonlight and the four quarters of the world are filled with earth's joyous song.

Purandara Parajaya

Purandara Parajaya, the first of Munshi's plays in this series, is woven out of the Puranic story of the wooing of Sukanya, wife of the aged Chyavana, by the handsome Ashvins, of the sudden surge of yearning which rose within her at the sight of the glorious youths, and of her realisation of the sanctity of the marriage bond and of her duty to her wedded husband.

Though Munshi had to keep in mind the traditional facts of Sukanya's story, he chose to select only a few of them, rejecting some and creating others from his imagination to suit the plan and purpose of his play. Art, after all, is selection. This has to be done by every author who writes plays or novels based on tradition. The most famous writers have taken such liberty in works based on traditional themes. Note the difference between Kalidasa's *Shakuntala* and the *Shakuntala* portrayed earlier in *Mahabharata*; between Shaw's *Cleopatra* and Shakespeare's; and again between Dante's *Ulysses* and Homer's. Munshi has taken similar liberty in *Purandara Parajaya*. Combining his rich imagination with his consummate art, he has enhanced the moral interest of the Puranic story by introducing new ideas into the play and rescuing the ancient theme from the traditional treatment.

Many an ancient writer who has exploited Sukanya's story for dramatic purpose has laid stress on her outer conflict when she rejects the advances of the Ashvins. They have portrayed only this aspect of her character. In Munshi's creation there is an exquisite portrayal of Sukanya's character and of her triumph over the inward conflict into which she is plunged by the appearance of the Ashvins. In her, there is a struggle not between love and honour, not between two thoughts or two emotions, but between her conscious mind and her sub-conscious

mind, between human ties and the ties of the soul. With admirable art, Munshi develops the inward conflict between Sukanya's irresistible urge of the flesh and her sacred duty to her husband, Chyavana. Unaided by any extraneous force, she resolves the conflict by overcoming the call of the senses to cling to her husband despite his decrepitude. This human aspect of her character enhances our interest in the story by stressing its emotional and romantic elements.

The whole purpose and significance of Munshi's conception of the character of Sukanya in this play is that in the face of dire temptation and despite the justification she has for yielding to it, she rejects the prospect of fleshly pleasure, regards marriage as a sacrament, and preserves her wifely honour in thought as well as in deed. In presenting her thus, Munshi has created a *genre* character and brought a myth to life in flesh and blood with an appeal which is irresistible because it is deeply and so truly human.

Chyavana, the chief of the Bhrigus, waged an implacable war against God Indra. Cursed by Indra, Chyavana became prematurely old and shrivelled in the very prime of his youth. The war between the two, however, continued. The Bhrigus were at the end of their wits and could do nothing to remove the dreadful curse from their chief. In order that Chyavana may have an heir, the Bhrigus forced Sukanya's father, King of the Saryatas, to give his young and lovely daughter to their aged and decrepit chief.

Vidanwant, Chyavana's disciple, arrives to request Sukanya's father to send her to her husband's hermitage. Sukanya refuses to go. She shudders at the very thought of her husband, who can scarcely see, move, hear or speak. Considering his daughter's blooming youth and the

decrepitude of her husband, Sukanya's father at first declines to send her. A heated discussion follows. When Saryata persists in his refusal, Vidanwant threatens him with the wrath of the Bhrigus and points out the disastrous consequences which must follow. Sukanya's father cannot incur the wrath of Chyavana. He yields and, with a heavy heart, consents to send his daughter to her husband.

Sukanya leaves her parents, with tears in her eyes. They part from her in sorrow. After she has been two months in his hermitage on Mount Vaidurya, Chyavana is seen lying on a deerskin spread on the ground. He looks like a skeleton, his eyes sunken into the sockets, his skin all black and hard, shrivelled to the bone. Chyavana casts a ghastly look at Sukanya who is lying nearby with her face to the ground.

Shamitri, their old maid, brings a milk pudding for Chyavana and asks Sukanya to feed it to the *Rishi* with her own hand. Sukanya angrily refuses, saying "It is time for his death and not for his food." Shamitri is stunned by Sukanya's remark. Meanwhile, Vidanwant arrives and also asks Sukanya to feed the *Rishi* who, he reminds her, takes food only from the hand of his wife.

"I will not do it, understand! Let him die of hunger," angrily answers Sukanya with clenched teeth, putting the dish on the ground.

Sukanya threatens to run away from the place in the thickening darkness of the night. Regarding her behaviour as an insult to the *Rishi*, Vidanwant threatens her with the wrath of Agni. Sukanya is adamant and moves towards the door. But she stops in her tracks on seeing a flash of lightning in the sky to which Vidanwant points as an indication of Agni's wrath. Undaunted, Sukanya in her turn invokes God Indra, the inveterate enemy of Chyavana, and prays to him to hurl down

devastation and ruin upon Chyavana and his disciples. The invocation seems to have immediate effect: the sky is ripped by fearful lightning followed by a heavy downpour of rain. Vidanwant is wonderstruck and greatly disturbed. He thinks the lightning and the rain are the result of Sukanya's invocation to Indra. Vidanwant now invokes God Agni. His invocation, too, has the desired effect. The thunder weakens, the rain stops, the clouds vanish and presently the moon is seen shedding its light from the clearing sky.

Sukanya is flabbergasted by this evidence of Vidanwant's power. She falls down in a swoon. Chyavana's disciple laughs in triumph and bowing in reverence before his *guru*, goes away quietly, after asking Shamitri to see that the sage is fed by Sukanya when she recovers.

After a while Sukanya opens her eyes, looks round fearfully, and speaks in astonishment: "Is it true that Vidanwant has vanquished Indra and established God Agni?"

"Yes, mother," replies Shamitri softly, "you have no idea of our strength—the strength of our Maharshi. Now feed him with your own hand."

While Sukanya feeds Chyavana with a trembling hand, Shamitri recounts the sage's past glory and tells her that Chyavana was an attractive personality before the curse of Indra made him prematurely old. "When he walked proudly among beautiful women," says Shamitri with glowing enthusiasm, "Maharshi was the most handsome of them all."

Sukanya is amazed at Shamitri's description of her decrepit husband and speaks in a bewildered tone: "Women actually fell in love with this corpse of a man, decrepit and lifeless! Can he be the same handsome man who used to walk with pride among beautiful women?"

And today what do I see of him? He is not able even to recognise me, much less to embrace me. How long has he been lying in this deplorable condition?"

"Only for the last seven years."

"Seven years! How long will he go on like this?" asks Sukanya. Without waiting for a reply from Shamitri, Sukanya answers herself: "Until he dies or I die." Looking pathetically towards Chyavana, she continues: "He will not die. He will remain for ever in this horrible condition. What will happen to me, O God!" In despair, Sukanya cries bitterly in uncontrollable anguish and beats her face which is bathed in tears.

Recovering herself after a while, Sukanya looks at her lovely body in the full bloom of youth. She is conscious of her beauty and its worth. She thinks it is sheer folly to let her youth and life be wasted as they are, with her throbbing desires unfulfilled. Enamoured of her own charms, she looks around in the soft light of the moon to see if there is anyone to admire her charms and embrace her to her heart's content.

Fired with voluptuous passion, she cries in the wilderness: "These smooth hands crave for a sweet embrace; these luscious lips are athirst for kisses; this heart hankers to clasp someone to its breast. Alas! there is no one to satisfy my yearning," wails Sukanya with a deep sigh.

She now decides to achieve that satisfaction which will be the triumph of her beauty, her blooming youth and of her womanhood. Her life thereafter will be one long moment of sensual delight spent in a perpetual search for new pleasures.

So she reflects a while, and intoxicated by the call of the flesh and full of faith, the suppliant Sukanya lifts her hands heavenward invoking the Gods to take her away as their bride. Like the sun emerging from the clouds,

her countenance suddenly brightens, her eyes expand, her bosom heaves and swells, even her stature seems to grow with the intensity of her expectation. Suddenly she beholds the Heavenly Twins face to face. The Ashvins have appeared in response to her prayer and she is stirred to the depths of her being by their bewitching charm and manly beauty. Sukanya is timid, but the Ashvins reassure her gently. "Such grace hath crowned thy prayer, Sukanya, fear thee not."

Encouraged by their sweet words, forth springs Sukanya eager to embrace her lords for the consummation of her passion. But the Gods elude her and disappear, promising to meet her the following evening.

There is now a remarkable change in Sukanya's face, her cheeks abloom with the flush of joy, her lips fragrant as the fresh rose, her eyes agleam with passion. She runs gaily to the river to bathe. The placid waters of the stream reflecting the golden rays of the setting sun and the picturesque natural beauty all around arouse in her sweet pulsations of life. Enamoured of her own charms, Sukanya seems to dream waking and seeing in fancy the fair Ashvins, she speaks in ecstasy. "How beautiful the Ashvins are! In their blissful embrace will flee all my woe." So Sukanya muses in voluptuous ecstasy, but the unexpected happens.

The next day, Sukanya goes near the lotus pond to keep her tryst with the Ashvins. On reaching there, she sees a pretty young woman of easy virtue being chased and chastised by a group of men who are guardians of social morals. Sukanya, a mute witness of the scene, receives a shock which transforms her whole outlook. "If this girl is a wanton, so am I," she says to herself. "If she has sinned in body, I have sinned in mind. Have I not come to the brink of a precipice below which is the

slope of perdition? I am looked upon with reverence as the Master's wife by young and old alike. Why? Because of my supposed purity. Shall I throw away that priceless possession for the mirth of an evanescent moment? No, come what may, I will remain true to wedlock and never swerve so much as an inch from the path of virtue." Pride of race, social instinct and the call of purity are awakened in her; she overcomes the urge of her senses and returns to her devotion and her love for her husband, purged of concupiscence.

The Ashvins appear at the stipulated time to take Sukanya away. But to their surprise, she declines to go with them. Her true self again, she declares with pride and triumph: "Maharshi and I are one and inseparable. When I accepted his elevated position as the Rishi, I accepted his decrepitude too . . ."

With the change in her outlook, the Ashvins are pleased and cure Chyavana of his premature old age, the result of Indra's curse. The Rishi regains his youth and is upon his feet. Indra, the erstwhile enemy of Chyavana, is vanquished and makes peace with him.

In course of time, the name of Chyavana became synonymous with rejuvenated youth and that of Sukanya with untainted virtue and wifely devotion.

The play is a landmark in Indian literature, for it takes up a Puranic subject, full of the dust of the past, and fills it with the breath of a new life. The atmosphere created here is that of the *Atharvaveda*: we hear magic chants and see rituals of miraculous beauty.

Avibhakta Atma

It is in *Avibhakta Atma* that Munshi first combined Greek and Indian ideas, that true lovers are but halves of the same soul, one soul in two bodies, that seeking unity through a succession of births, they end in a Nirvana when

they recognise their indivisibility and become the undivided soul. And who but Vasishtha and Arundhati, the finest pair in ancient Indian tradition, could be chosen as a type to represent the author's idea?

Vasishtha was one of the seven great Rishis of the primaeval world who were transformed into the flaming constellation called the Great Bear (*Ursa Major*). Arundhati was inseparable from her husband and hence she was given a place in the heavens next to her husband.

During marriage ceremonies in India, Vasishtha and Arundhati are worshipped together; they are the guardian deities of domestic felicity. The stars which bear their name are pointed out to every married couple soon after their wedding. According to Kalidasa, Shiva himself was moved to marry Parvati because he happened to look at the star of Arundhati, the ever faithful comrade of her Lord.

The present play recreates an episode as old as time, for it belongs to the dawn of Aryan life. The Aryans once lived in the golden land around Mount Meru and were happy. There they incurred the wrath of God Varuna. As a result, snow descended upon their homeland and they had to migrate. Manu, son of Vivasvat, saved from destruction five of the Arya tribes which continued their wanderings for many ages. Seven primaeval Sages had been glorified into the seven stars which formed the constellation of Saptarishi, Riksha, the Great Bear. The great God Varuna, however, had promised the Aryas that the Seven great Rishis who formed that constellation would appear as certain living sages, and when they did so appear, the Aryas would find a home where they would live happily forever afterwards. Six of the great Sages had already been born. But the Aryas were very worried, for God Varuna's promise held a restrictive clause. If within a hundred years, all seven of the great Sages did not appear

in living form, the constellation of the Bear would not change a Sign and the Aryas would be destroyed.

The Sage Vasishtha, though young, had a great reputation for learning and self-discipline and was expected to be chosen by God Agni as the vehicle for that Seventh Sage for whom the Aryas were waiting. Arundhati, daughter of the Sage Medhatithi and herself an ascetic, had also the ambition to be the human vehicle for the Seventh Sage, when God Agni, at a great sacrificial session, should choose to reflect the face of the person upon whom that Sage had descended.

The play opens in the ashram of Medhatithi. It is an ideal woodland scene. Large shade-giving trees and green creepers lend a sylvan atmosphere. The still silence of the morn is broken only by the sweet twittering of birds. Sportive deer frisk and gambol on the outskirts of the ashram. The placid waters of the river Saraswati reflect the golden rays of the morning sun.

Vasishtha comes to meet his beloved Arundhati at the ashram of her father, Medhatithi. The latter compliments Vasishtha on the beauty of his *mantras*. Vasishtha humbly confesses that he does not compose them. He explains the secret of their composition:

“Maharshi, I do not compose the hymns. In the early morn or late at night, when I sit on the bank of the Saraswati or on the top of a hill, the myriad-eyed Varuna, whose path even the birds know not, smiles on me. He talks to me as a father would, tells me of things hid from mortal eyes. I become strong but only with his strength, and on my tongue presides the Goddess of Speech. I speak no doubt, but it is not me that speaks. I only repeat the *mantras* as they come to me, as I see them writ large in the heavens. Sage, I have no will of my own; I am but an echo of the God.”

Later Kratu and Pulastya, two of the six Sages chosen by Agni, meet when Vasishtha happens to be in the Ashram. The hundred years are running out and the Sages are unhappy that the Seventh Sage has not yet manifested himself. Kratu feelingly narrates the history of the destruction of the Aryas, consequent on the wrath of God Varuna. "We live but to see the Seventh Sage appear among us," he adds in a tone of despair.

Vasishtha challenges, though in all humility, the despondency of Kratu. "Master! The spirit which inspires the strength of the Aryas neither wavers nor tires. It grows stronger by sacrifice."

"Vasishtha! Do you want to teach me also the message of sacrifice!" exclaims Kratu, laughing cynically.

"Master! I teach only what I know," replies Vasishtha reverentially. "But what I teach imparts to my disciples both peace and equanimity based on the strength which emanates from the Cosmic Order of Varuna, the Mighty".

The audacious reply of the young sage enrages Kratu who cries out. "Boy, the Cosmic Order of Varuna cannot be realised without stern austerity."

"Maharshi! I am only trying to understand," replies Vasishtha in great humility.

In the second Act, Vasishtha asks Arundhati to marry him.

VASISHTHA. My pupils have been waiting for their teacher's wife, Arundhati, and, for want of her, my cows languish.

ARUNDHATI (shaking her head): How can I take that honoured place?

VASISHTHA. (Placing one of his hands on Arundhati's shoulder and looking intently at her): Why not? Did we not belong to each other since the days we were students in the ashram of the great Pulastya on the banks of the

Saraswati? Did we not play with each other? Together we brought fuel for the sacrifice and together we collected the sacred grass. Together we ran, laughed as we ran, together we fell. No woman is dearer to me than you: no man is dearer to you than myself. Why should you not come to my ashram and grace it as its mistress, Arundhati?

ARUNDHATI: But why marry, Vasishtha? We are ascetics, you and I. We do not need the bonds of the body. Domestic life is not for such as we.

VASISHTHA (with set mouth): Why not? In this vast expanse of the Seven Rivers, there is no woman like you, nor am I quite insignificant. Why hesitate? When you see me, your eyes betray their tale. When I see you, my heart is filled with a divine madness. Do not talk nonsense; let my blood-stream flow in harmony with yours. (Arundhati shakes her head): Think again, Arundhati. Why should our life streams flow apart? You are a woman in a thousand; among thousands of men, there is perhaps few like me. And if there are any such, they do not generally come together or do not feel the joy in each other's company. If at all they feel any such delight, barriers keep them apart. What has not happened in the course of many ages has happened to us. You and I equally yearn to be one. And why should we not be? Do not be obstinate

ARUNDHATI: Enough! Mother Saraswati lives on your tongue, Vasishtha, but I am not likely to be persuaded. The years we have spent in stern austerity should not go to waste.

VASISHTHA: Why should they, Arundhati? Alone we cannot be what we would be if we are together.

ARUNDHATI (oppressed with pain): I know, Vasishtha. But I am not as other women are. I am mad I cannot

even preserve the treasure which has fallen into my hands.

VASISHTHA (striking one hand with her other) : But why ?

ARUNDHATI (sadly) . Shall I tell you ? Once we marry, our self-restraint will be at an end. How can domestic life and the pleasures of the flesh and of the world be ours ? We are ascetics.

VASISHTHA (looking up) : Why not ? Are we not human ? Have we no vigour ? If the laws of Varuna can only be obeyed by sacrificing the call of the flesh, why did God create us as we are.

ARUNDHATI (sounding tired) : How can we preserve the laws of Varuna by submitting to the desires of the flesh ?

VASISHTHA : We might deny ourselves the joys of conjugal life if we were not fitted for each other, if we disliked each other, or if the duties to which we were born came between us. But if high-souled men and women like us do not undertake the burden of daily life, what will be the future of the Aryas ?

ARUNDHATI (sadly) : Even you, with all your self-discipline, do not understand me. Discipline lies in control, not in seeking satisfaction. And yet you speak like an ordinary man

VASISHTHA (firmly) : I do not speak without thought. My self-restraint is unshaken. If, in begging you to marry me, I were lured by sensuality or by your beauty or by the mere pleasure of your company, it would be proof that I had lost my self-control and fallen from my ascetic state. But I do not crave for your beauty and form. If you were to lose your beauty, I should adore you the more. If you were lame I would carry you on my back. If you die, I should live on smeared with your ashes. I do not want any other thing : I want you.

When Arundhati speaks of the strength which arises out of austerities. Vasishtha asks: "Is it strength to keep from me the woman who was born to be with myself, to be the mother of my children? What is the use of a strength that comes from preventing the birth of strong and cultured Aryas?" And he goes on to tell her of the Undivided Soul.

"Its halves move in the stream of time in search of unity. The search often proves fruitless, but sometimes the corresponding halves meet. Then the whole springs into existence once more, the divided fragments become the Undivided Soul and its trials come to an end."

Arundhati tells him of her ambition that the Seventh Sage should appear in her. In the same way, Vasishtha wants him to appear in him. Thus do their ambitions conflict and their souls cannot be one.

But Vasishtha changes his mind. He will cease his attempts to make the Seventh Sage appear in him Arundhati should try for it alone, unhampered by a rival.

Then Vasishtha prays to Varuna "Great Varuna, I, your son, am calling upon you. Give me the power of undaunted resolution. You dwelt in my heart and said that Arundhati and I were one. I cannot live without her I cannot be strong in self-discipline without her aid. Without her, I cannot pray to you. In order to fulfil your laws, you brought the two halves of our soul together as they floated on the stream of time Now, one and undivided, let us realise our souls Not I, nor my strength, nor my austerities, are mine, but our Soul. Our Soul is not in one body, but in two, inspiring both If you should come, uplift that soul. We are not two, but one I vow, by all the strength I possess, to keep this soul one and undivided "

* * *

One year has elapsed Vasishtha claims that he and Arundhati have but one soul between them. But to the

orthodox sages, such a belief smacks of sin : they are angry at Vasishtha's claim. Shwetkarn, one of the sages, enters into a discussion with Vasishtha.

Meanwhile Kratu arrives and in a state of exultation informs Vasishtha that, in the sacrificial fire, Agni has emerged in the form of Vasishtha.

But, to the astonishment of the sages, Vasishtha humbly declines to be the Seventh Sage. The reason that he gives is that there is only one soul between him and Arundhati and since the Gods have chosen him alone as the Seventh Sage, the unity of their souls is not acknowledged by the Gods. Hence it is impossible for him to accept the honour.

Kratu persuades Vasishtha to accept the elevated position but he is adamant.

Kratu becomes furious and curses Vasishtha. The curse takes effect. Vasishtha's pupils desert him; even his cows run away in fright.

A scene of pathos follows. Vasishtha is now a lonely man; he is sorry for himself and pitifully speaks pointing to the cow that flees in fright:

"Even you, Mother, have forsaken me!"

He continues. "Every one has forgotten me. No wonder: None will speak to him whom Varuna forsakes: Will you also forget me, Arundhati? No, No, how can she forget? Only if my strength disappears and if the Undivided Soul which I have seen is a myth, can she forget me. (crying) No No. The Undivided Soul is not a myth. It is the work of Varuna, Creator of the Cosmic Order, and the Father who created us Oh God! how can you punish me for seeing a vision of this soul? God Varuna, if to visualise this soul was a sin, why did you create me and Arundhati?" Vasishtha faints.

Meanwhile Arundhati and her father come to

congratulate Vasishtha on being chosen by the Gods for the appearance in him of the Seventh Sage but they find him lying on the ground unconscious.

Vasishtha recovers after a while and tells them that he has been cursed by Kratu for declining to perform the sacrificial rites as the Seventh Sage. Vasishtha speaks in tears

"I am cursed. My ashram is a wilderness. My disciples have all left me; my cows have been taken away. Oh! Even Father Varuna has turned his face from me."

Vasishtha then asks them to go away lest the curse should overtake them too.

At this stage people come to burn down the ashram.

Vasishtha warns Arundhati that in a short while the fire will spread and advises her to leave the place. Seeing the fire spreading, Vasishtha in sorrow moves towards the river. Arundhati takes him by the hand and asks him to step into the boat.

"Where are you going?" asks Vasishtha.

"Where the holy Saraswati takes us—where Aryas can never go," replies Arundhati.

"But why are you coming?" enquires Vasishtha

"Because our soul takes us," replies Arundhati, smiling. Vasishtha is surprised at the answer.

"You seem to have lost faith in our Undivided Soul so soon," remarks Arundhati. "Where there is the Soul, the bodies must follow."

Then, hand in hand, Vasishtha and Arundhati rush through the burning bushes and take to the boat. They are heard saying "We are one—and one we shall remain"

* * *

Two years later, Vasishtha, Arundhati and their little son are living happily in a sequestered ashram far away

from Aryavarta. Their only possession is a cow; their only joy the fulfilment of the laws of the Undivided Soul.

But there is drought in Aryavarta. People attribute the calamity to the wickedness of Vasishtha and Arundhati. They come to destroy them. Hand in hand, Vasishtha and Arundhati offer themselves to be killed.

Vasishtha is wounded and falls to the ground unconscious. At this stage, God Varuna appears to take him away. Intervening, Arundhati speaks to him angrily: 'Have you come to take him away alone? You too are forsaking us in the end! You could not tolerate our Undivided Soul. O Lord of the Universe! I would not even care for your heartlessness towards us. By our sacrifice we are one, our soul is undivided. If you have come to take Vasishtha, you must take me too.'

Meanwhile the Great Sages arrive with the news that in a fresh sacrificial session, God Agni has appeared in the forms of Vasishtha and Arundhati, indicating that the Seventh Sage manifested himself in both of them. Finding that Vasishtha has been killed, they are shocked.

The sages seek out God Varuna and beg of him to spare Vasishtha, for without both Vasishtha and Arundhati, the Seventh Sage will not appear and consequently the Aryas will perish.

Varuna grants them their desire: Vasishtha is brought back to life.

Henceforth the Seventh Sage appears as the Undivided Soul of Vasishtha and Arundhati and the Aryas grow happy and prosperous in Sapta Sindhu, where the Undivided Soul of Vasishtha and Arundhati had been found.

This is why the star of Arundhati dwells with Vasishtha's in *Ursa Major*.

CHAPTER X

AN EPIC OF THE ANCIENT ARYANS II

The four plays—*Vishvaratha*, *Shambar Kanya*, *Deve Didheli* and *Vishvamitra Rishi*—and the two novels *Lomaharshini* and *Bhagawan Parashurama* give a connected and cogent narrative of the expansion of Aryan culture not only in Saptasindhu but also in Mahishmati, Dandakaranya and the whole of Dakshinapath.

Lopamudra and Vishvamitra are the central characters around whom this saga is woven. Lopamudra is a luminous figure radiating light and power. She preaches that Aryan culture is not a matter of heredity but of acquisition. She makes strenuous efforts to bring to an end the unceasing war between the Aryans and the Dasyus. She wants the latter to be assimilated into the Aryan fold. Her love for Agastya is deep and Munshi has described it with great beauty and power, both of imagination and expression.

Lopamudra's disciple is Vishvamitra who shares her ideals. Born to the throne of the Bharatas, he renounces it and, by dint of unparalleled *tapasya*, becomes the greatest Brahmarishi of his time. He revolutionises the sacrificial lore of the Aryas and converts sacrifices into rituals of purity. To him is vouchsafed by the Sun the *Gayatri mantra*. He stands forth as the architect of the destiny of Aryavarta. Munshi's Vishvamitra embodies in himself the deathless vitality of *dharma*.

Vishvaratha

DISTANT Anupadesha (modern Gujarat) is ruled by Mahishmata, a fiery old chief of the frontier Aryan tribes

of the Haihayas. His High-Priest is Richika, head of the Bhrigus, those warrior-priests who claim descent from Shukra and Chyavana.

Mahishmata and his irrepressible Haihaya tribesmen defy the moral supremacy of Richika, and as a consequence the High-Priest lays the Haihaya tribes under a curse and leaves Anupadesha for Aryavarta, (the Punjab), the land of the cultured Aryans.

Richika comes to Gadhi, king of the war-like Bharatas, and woos and wins the hand of Satyavati, his daughter. In course of time, a boy, Jamadagni, is born to them, and about the same time Satyavati's mother also gives birth to a male child, named Vishvaratha, who is handsome as a little God and is heir to the throne of the war-like Bharatas.

Jamadagni and Vishvaratha grow up together and are inseparable. When they are seven years old, both fall in love with Lopamudra, the beautiful daughter of Bharadvaja, a renowned master of learning. She refuses to marry, and, running away from the wrath of her father, seeks asylum with Richika, the Bhrigu sage. Young Vishvaratha and Jamadagni feel that, being such great friends, both of them must marry Lopamudra, though she is older than they by several years. They, therefore, are very disconsolate when they learn that Lopamudra does not intend to marry at all.

Both boys are sent for their education to the hermitage of the sage Agastya, the most powerful of the Aryan Rishis and the High-Priest of Divodasa, King of the Tritsu tribe. On their way to their destination, they meet Vasishtha, the younger brother of Agastya. They also meet Sudasa, the peevish son of King Divodasa. This prince feels an instinctive dislike for the handsome, open-hearted Vishvaratha and tries to drown him.

In the ashram of the sage Agastya, Vishvaratha is

soon surrounded by loyal friends among whom is Rohini, the little daughter of the sage himself, and Riksha, an uncouth idiot who aspires to become a great sage in his own right. Jamadagni, the Bhrigu, is of course his closest friend. Agastya also comes to love the pupil who has so quickly mastered both the Vedic lore and the art of war, of which he himself is such a renowned exponent. Sudasa, who is studying in the same hermitage, spends his time in intriguing against Vishvaratha and making fruitless efforts to outshine him. From his infancy, Vishvaratha, loving, loved and open-hearted and always seeking guidance from the Gods, becomes the centre of all who surround him, except Prince Sudasa, whose jealous temperament cannot brook a rival so attractive and one who has already succeeded to the wide domains of the war-like Bharatas.

King Divodasa of the Tritsus comes to the hermitage and the sage Agastya holds an exhibition of his pupils' skill. Vishvaratha's graceful body, modest behaviour and prowess in archery rouse the admiration of all present. Naturally, Divodasa's son, Sudasa, is furious.

King Divodasa has set his heart on the destruction of Shambara, lord of ninety-nine forts, and the king of the dark-skinned, snub-nosed, non-Aryan Dasyus. Agastya, the High Priest, is equally ruthless. He believes in the purity and the destiny of the Aryan race, and would destroy the Dasyus whose ways are corrupting the morals of his people. In particular, he is unforgiving towards the new band of young Aryan sages who are preaching that Aryan culture is not a matter of race but of acquisition, and who would uplift the Dasyus and bring them into the Aryan fold. Of this band, the most fascinating and therefore the most dangerous member is Lopamudra, daughter of the sage Bharadvaja, now grown into magnificent womanhood and still unmarried. She is working for an understanding

between the two races and towards her, the mighty Agastya is uncompromising; no one dares to mention her name in his presence.

The war begins. Shambara's men steal one night into the hermitage of Agastya and kidnap Vishvaratha and his friend, the uncouth Riksha. They are taken to a distant fortress, where live the wives and children of Shambara, Lord of the Dasyus, now gone to war. The fort is in the charge of his High Priest, the dreaded Bhairava, favourite of Ugrakala, the phallus-shaped guardian deity of the war-like Dasyus.

The dark-skinned Dasyus, who are affectionate, hospitable and unspoilt by sophistication, welcome the two captives. Ugra, Shambara's favourite daughter, straightaway falls in love with the handsome Vishvaratha. Unfamiliar with restraint, she woos the young prince. When she is repulsed, she pines for him during the day and comes to his hut at night, and pours out her love-sick heart to him in passionate and plaintive songs.

Shut up within the narrow fort and surrounded by strange but highly affectionate people, Vishvaratha gets rid of the racial hatred which has kept the Aryans and the Dasyus apart. He even begins to love the simple, honest folk whom his guru, Agastya, had taught him to hate. His heart easily goes out to all that is good and simple.

Riksha, meanwhile, knows no restraints. He likes these dark maidens who never deny him anything. He also loves their wine and ways. Bhairava, the dark High-Priest of the dread deity, Ugrakala, looks on with stern, silent displeasure at what he regards as signs of his people's collapse.

Vishvaratha's loving nature can resist Ugra no longer. Hearing her wild sensual call, he flings aside his false pride and accepts her. Her simple but true devotion has won him over.

Shambar Kanya

After a great victory, Shambara comes to his native fortress to meet his people and to propitiate his tutelary deity. He also brings with him Lopamudra, whom he has taken prisoner but whom he looks upon as his friend and the friend of his people.

Lopamudra, divinely tall and fair, wise beyond her years, and endowed with a sympathetic understanding, carries with her a magic atmosphere of strength and inspiration. She chides Shambara for having kidnapped her, for she knows that, in spite of their disapproval of her ways, the Aryas love her and will be stirred to irrepressible hostility on hearing the news of her capture. Shambara laughs at her fears; he is too powerful for the Aryas, he says.

Vishvaratha meets Lopamudra, who brings with her the aroma of high-souled Aryan life. He also remembers his childish fancy for the girl who has now turned into so glorious a woman and so wise a sage. He feels ashamed of the life he is leading here. "Yes," he tells Shambara, "I eat, I drink; I sleep. Ugra has made me a bondslave. I am like an animal in a cage. I pine for my Bharatas, my brave kinsmen. And you have taken away from me even the privilege of dying in a battle field at the call of the Gods." He is now homesick and Ugra is not so welcome to him as before.

Ugra also acquires a deep hatred for Lopamudra. To her, this Arya woman, whom her Vishvaratha adores, is a symbol of the tragedy coming into her life and a reminder of the world to which he belongs and in which she, dark-skinned Ugra, has no place. In Lopamudra's company, Vishvaratha finds inspiration, which Ugra can neither give nor share.

Riksha is characteristically happy. He sheds penitent tears for his serious lapses before Lopamudra and drowns his sorrows at night in drink and debauchery.

RIKSHA (wiping his tears with his fists) : Venerable Mother, I can keep everything, but not self-control. All the Gods have conspired against me. None of them even hear my prayers. The more I pray, the more powerful becomes my temptation. Really I am not an Arya at all. (Looking piteously at Lopamudra, he weeps).

LOPAMUDRA : What is the use of talking like this? Why don't you save yourself?

RIKSHA : Venerable Mother, (sobbing) I assure you, I am not a bad man (he smiles). The Gods themselves have sent you here. Since you have come, the fire of mighty resolves is burning bright in my heart. (Two Dasyu girls lurking behind Lopamudra signal to him). Avaunt, you shameless hussies! (Lopamudra turns round but the Dasyu girls hide behind a tree).

RIKSHA : I heard some noise Whence do these new girls come day after day? When they are here, my heart goes pit-a-pat. (The Dasyu girls call him by gestures) Avaunt, you shameless wenches! (Lopamudra turns round; the girls hide again). No, there is no one here. This wretched noseless race makes me spit on it with contempt I abjure it for ever—I promise you. I am a great sinner.

LOPAMUDRA But, child, what is the use of talking? Since I have come, I have found you do nothing but drink.

RIKSHA : Mother, it is bad, too bad. Oh! What am I? A Tritsu, the pupil of Agastya. And I remain a drunkard! Riksha, shame on you (sobbing). But what can I do? Have mercy on me (crying). I am a good man, but when I see this fortress full of demons—these dark shameless women—and this prison, my soul quakes I

become miserable. I, the beloved pupil of Agastya, I drown my misery in wine. What a lot is mine! Fie, Riksha! How low have you fallen!

And the wise Lopamudra sighs; the war is destroying her own people and the people whom she loves. Reports of Shambara's defeat reach the fort; and Bhairava, the High-Priest of the dread Ugrakala, decides that his God demands an offering of Lopamudra, Vishvaratha and Riksha. He sows the seeds of suspicion and distrust among the Dasyus. Portents are noticed, and it is decided to appease the dread Ugrakala with a suitable sacrifice.

The three human victims are tied to stone pillars around the open air shrine of Ugrakala.

And thus they talk while waiting for the sunrise which is to bring them death.

VISHVARATHA: We shall not perish, No—never. God Varuna himself has spoken words of comfort to me. I see with my eyes—Aryas—yes, I see them—the conquerors of the world, crossing streams and mountains—subjugating Dasyus—shouting “Victory for Indra” in every direction. Joy is in their eyes; in their hearts is inspiration; the world is at their feet.

And, before the approach of death, Vishvaratha expresses his feelings for Lopamudra in these words:

“How wonderful you are! Seeing you, my eyes have new light. Mother, you are resplendant—a veritable Goddess Divine words issue from your mouth. Wherever you walk, the land becomes pure.”

Ugra learns that her lover is to be sacrificed to the deity at sunrise. There is no struggle in her simple heart between her attachment to her father and her race and her love for her lover. She knows what she wants. By a path known to a few, she steals out of the fort and informs Divodasa and the sage Agastya of the awful lot which awaits

Vishvaratha. Returning by the same path, she brings with her the enemies of her people into the fortress.

Agastya, accompanied by the Tritsu and Bharata warriors, arrives just in time to save Vishvaratha and others from being burnt alive. They are set free. The fort is captured. In the confusion of the moment, Bhairava, the High-Priest, alone escapes. Shambara, wounded and on the point of death, curses his daughter:

"Wicked girl, you brought my foes into the fort to save your lover? For him, you destroyed your parents and your race."

AGASTYA: Shambara, even on the threshold of death you lack grace.

SHAMBARA (with clenched teeth): Go where you will, wench; go and dance over the dead bodies of your father and mother, of your brothers, of your people.

UGRA (crying piteously): Father, no, no (sobs)!

LOPAMUDRA (with affection). Shambara, what are you saying?

SHAMBARA (raising his head): The snakes of Pashupati will poison you in every limb. Disgrace of your family, go and sit in the lap of your lover. Wherever your name is heard, there shall rise flames of destruction.

When Shambara dies, Agastya offers a prayer to the Gods and calls on Vishvaratha to surrender Ugra. Frightened, she clings to Vishvaratha. Agastya orders his pupil to hand the Dasyu girl to him.

VISHVARATHA (with a frightened glance): Gurudev, Shambara's daughter is mine; you shall not touch her.

AGASTYA (in anger). Child, do not be a fool Those who hate the Gods shall not live. Leave her to me

UGRA (trembling): I am alone; I am yours; leave me not, Vishvaratha.

VISHVARATHA (to Ugra). Ugra, be quiet! (to

Agastya Gurudev! (He steps in front of Ugra) Do you want to snatch Shambara's daughter from me? (Looks menacingly at others).

AGASTYA (coming nearer) : Go! Go away!

VISHVARATHA (to his tribesmen) : Pratardana, my brave Bharatas, Shambara's daughter is my queen; I have sworn so by all the Gods. If you let a hair of her head be touched, the curses of our ancestors will be on you.

PRATARDANA (stepping near Ugra) : As Your Majesty pleases.

AGASTYA : Are you mad?

VISHVARATHA (in a frightening attitude) : Gurudev! I cannot touch you. But you can take my life. Shambara's daughter saved it from Ugrakala. Anger Incarnate! Before you kill this helpless girl, kill me. Take my life. I am the lover of Shambara's daughter. I am not fit to live. Kill me (Looks at Agastya with steady eyes).

AGASTYA (with burning anger, raises his weapon) : You dare to oppose me?

LOPAMUDRA (stepping between Vishvaratha and Agastya) : What are you doing, Agastya? Your fury is not quenched even by this poor girl's tears

Lopamudra looks at Agastya Agastya stops, hesitates; their glances meet like a clash of swords

LOPAMUDRA . Are you bent on killing both your son and his wife with one stroke.

AGASTYA (angrily) Even you stand in my way?

LOPAMUDRA : Yes, I do

Agastya's hand, which held the sword, slowly falls by his side

The curtain falls.

Deve Didheli

THE drama opens in Tritsugrama, capital of Divodasa, where the victorious army of the Tritsus and the Bharatas has returned with spoils. Lopamudra also comes here with it. For the first time, she lives among people to whom Agastya's word has been law. She moves among them as a Goddess of flaming beauty, winning hearts and spreading heretical views about racial differences, intervening on behalf of the vanquished Dasyus. Many young men of the town are in love with her and want to follow her to her hermitage as her pupils. Vishvaratha, the beloved disciple of Agastya, is now her favourite disciple. He desires to marry the hated Shambara's daughter according to Arya rites. He proclaims boldly that an Arya is not born but is made by temperament and training and that Ugra is more Aryan than most Arya women.

Agastya, in the hour of his life's triumph, when the hated Shambara is no more, sees his universe crashing about him. The woman whose name could not even be mentioned in his presence is in the midst of his people, uttering heresies, bringing men and women to her feet. The one pupil, whom he had looked upon as a worthy heir to his learning and might was won over by her, and was insisting upon a marriage which was to him a sin of sins.

Agastya then swears a fearful oath. If Vishvaratha does not surrender Ugra, he, Agastya, the greatest of Arya sages, will yield up his life. And Vishvaratha swears another fearful oath. If he cannot marry Ugra, he will no longer live; for his life's mission will have ended.

The wise Lopamudra knows and admires both these obstinate men, master and pupil. Agastya, in the prime of manhood, was a mighty man whose ways had touched her heart and soul. Vishvaratha, she loved more than as a son.

Rohini, Agastya's lovely daughter, is also heartbroken. Before Vishvaratha was kidnapped by the Dasyus, she had loved him. Then she was betrothed to Sudasa, the prince of the Tritsus. Now she wants to get rid of the betrothal and marry her beloved Vishvaratha.

Dear old Riksha drinks profusely, tells tall stories of his heroic deeds in Shambara's fort, and claims to be the beloved pupil of Lopamudra.

In this situation, Lopamudra decides to save the two men she loves, and meets Agastya. She appeals to him to save Vishvaratha, but in vain.

When he refuses to listen to her and treats her appeals with contempt, she deftly pierces the armour of his self-assurance.

LOPAMUDRA (stepping forward) : Agastya, may I ask you one thing before you go?

AGASTYA : Yes, what is it?

LOPAMUDRA : Why are you afraid to speak to me? Come, what have I done?

AGASTYA : Daughter of Bharadvaja! The whole world is dying to speak to you. Is that not enough?

LOPAMUDRA (smilingly) : He with whom I wish to speak does not speak to me. What do you dislike in me?

AGASTYA (looks with anger at her and then says slowly) : I am afraid of you.

LOPAMUDRA (with flashing eyes) . Are you afraid of losing your heart?

AGASTYA (with contempt) . No. I am afraid of disappointing you.

LOPAMUDRA (with enthusiasm) . Agastya, the fear is all mine. So far, wherever I have gone, men have given me their hearts. I have accepted them without paying any price. Today I am prepared to pay the price, but you will not give me your heart. Why are you so cruel?

AGASTYA: You are bold.

LOPAMUDRA: When an equal meets you for the first time, you always find him bold.

AGASTYA (contemptuously): How can I be your equal?

LOPAMUDRA: Equals are born; they are not made.

AGASTYA: Have we not talked enough?

LOPAMUDRA: No. I have given up my vows. I am no longer content with accepting love; I want to win it

AGASTYA: Then shall I tell you the truth? Your efforts will be fruitless.

LOPAMUDRA (smiling with triumph): No. I have not been blind these two months; (with emphasis) No, no, no.

AGASTYA (contemptuously): What can I say to a great sage like you?

LOPAMUDRA (with smiling eyes): You will say it when the time comes. I am leaving for my ashram now. I have but one prayer to offer. May the Gods give you greater strength, and to your heart more sweetness (She looks down, smiles, collects her skirt and leaves).

Agastya looks after her like a mad man. Then he knits his brows, as if his heart is bleeding. He mutters: Shameless!

Rohini, Agastya's daughter, is miserable. When her betrothal with Sudasa is broken off and she is free to marry her Vishvaratha, a situation arises in which she must lose either her father or her lover.

When Rohini informs Vishvaratha that she is now free to marry him, he cries in anguish: "I was dying for the day when you would be free to marry me. But, today, how dare I ask you to be my co-wife with Ugra-Shambara's daughter?"

She tells him that he owes no obligation to a dark woman. Vishvaratha cannot accept this idea.

VISHVARATHA: Rohini, the Gods have a different mandate for me. In my heart, through my voice, echo these words which God Varuna has told me: "*No form, no colour can determine who is an Arya. Those who ask you to leave Ugra are non-Aryas; they seek the false distinctions of caste or colour. Ignore them: Die for the sake of the dark skinned Shambara's daughter; and a million Shambaras, besmeared with your ashes, will become Aryas and keep alive the flame of my worship.*"

Rohini meets Lopamudra and breaks down:

"Venerable! Of all men, two alone are my links with life. One of them or perhaps both will die, and what binds me to life will snap "

Lopamudra gives her solace. "Child, I am like you. What will happen to me if one of them dies?" She adds with determination: "Rohini, dry your tears. Neither of them will die—as long as I am alive. Rest assured of that. Let us see whether they will kill us both or we are able to save them."

Vishvaratha is already a Rishi in the making. He can commune with the Gods; and he asks them again and again why Ugra is not an Arya?

He invokes the aid of the God Surya, who gives him the *Gayatri*, the famous *mantra*, and because of its power, the Gods accept Ugra as an Arya woman.

Poor Ugra, born a princess, is miserable beyond words. She is in a strange world, among a strange, arrogant people. Her people are dead or enslaved. She lives only for Vishvaratha, but in her heart she feels that he is not what he was before Lopamudra came to the fort. With her childlike outlook, she considers that woman as her greatest enemy and invokes in pathetic words the aid of the Moon and the *Pipul* tree to make Vishvaratha smile on her

"Moon, Father mine, tell me what ails him? For

three days now, he has not smiled. My eyes are thirsty for his smiles. Moon! Won't you tell me where his smile has gone? (wipes a tear) Oh! I am so miserable. I have no home; no father, no people. Vishvaratha alone is my all. If you do not let him be with me, where can I go? (thoughtfully) Is he offended with me? Does he dislike me? Has some one stolen his heart? Oh, what shall I do? (She sits on the steps of the *Pipul* tree and offers it respects) *Pipul!* My God! Every one has left me. You are my only refuge. (coaxingly) Vishvaratha may say that you are not a God, but my mother said so; so did my nurse, and they worshipped you. I shudder at the Gods Vishvaratha worships. But my *Pipul*, won't you come to my rescue? I shall wash your basin clean, offer saffron and rice to you When my Vishvaratha smiles again, I shall weave a garland of flowers for you.

"*Pipul!* My protector! You know the whole thing, don't you? He came to my father's fort I called him He came I stood rooted like a tree Then he smiled. I came to live in his eyes—and I was alive again.

"Father *Pipul!* His mind wavered only when that white woman came She is clever, and she has stolen his heart Her tongue has a magic more dangerous than the voice of Bhairava Give me back his smile, which she has stolen from me Father! I fall at your feet

"Vishvaratha says that I am an Arya Let him say so. What he says must be right (with emotion) But *Pipul!* I will always worship you. Show me where his smile is hid My father's foes have enmeshed me, and his smile is all my world. Make him happy Keep him happy, and keep him by my side I shall be at his feet, his slave "

Lopamudra ultimately stakes everything on a last throw of dice. She appeals to Agastya to give up his

decision and to allow Vishvaratha to marry Shambara's daughter.

AGASTYA: Daughter of Bharadvaja! (decisively) Why do you try to change me? My vow will remain fixed even if the sun stands still. If Vishvaratha has respect for his master, loves the lore of the Rishis, and cares for my life—there is but one way out. He must surrender Shambara's daughter.

LOPAMUDRA: These are not the words of Agastya, the wise seer. Here, only the High-Priest speaks, lost in egotism.

KING DIVODASA (shocked): Lopamudra, what are you saying?

LOPAMUDRA: Something which the sage has never heard before—what he badly needs to hear.

AGASTYA (with contempt): I am listening. But it is difficult for you to realise the difference between an Arya and a non-Arya.

LOPAMUDRA: Best of Sages! Between Arya and Anarya, between white and dark, between high and low, you—a seer—should see no difference. (In a trembling voice) Steadfast as you are in learning and in strength, come with me, far away, to the forests, where the hungry and the unhappy await their redemption. Come with me; leave your pride here; give up this priesthood of the Aryas. Come with me. We shall sit under the same tree, we shall share the same deer skin; and what the Gods have left undone, we will accomplish.

AGASTYA (fascinated and humble): Daughter of Bharadvaja, I am all right as I am

LOPAMUDRA: You cannot but accept my invitation. If not now, some days later. But let me at least take away Ugra.

AGASTYA: You want to give her back to Vishvaratha.

LOPAMUDRA: Have you no faith in me?

AGASTYA: What is your object in this?

LOPAMUDRA (in a voice full of emotion): My object? Do you want to know it? Then I will tell you the truth. By you, King Divodasa and Mother Sarasvati, I swear. But do not blame me, if your pride is broken to bits. Two men only are dear to me as life itself.

DIVODASA: What!

LOPAMUDRA: King, do you remember that you wanted me to marry? That was years ago. Today, I know a man whom I want to marry. I know another who is more to me than a son. Both have gone mad. Each of them wants to destroy the other or die. But I swear by all my ancestors that so long as I am alive, neither of them shall do what he wants.

Divodasa blesses her, and with tears in his eyes leaves them. Agastya also wants to go, and asks for permission to do so

LOPAMUDRA When I ask you to wait, Agastya, why do you flee from me? Why dam the life-giving stream of love? (Agastya looks the other way) Won't you speak to me? Am I not worth looking at?

AGASTYA (looks at her like a drowning man): Worth looking at! For two months past, I have heard nothing but appreciation of your worth

LOPAMUDRA (in jest): Is that so?

AGASTYA: Every one, young and old, was ready to fight for you when you were taken a prisoner. Richika and Divodasa, whenever they see you, feel the energy of younger days. The dying Shambara, when he looked at you, was mad for love of you. Sages, unable to control themselves in your presence, hide themselves. My own daughter worships you like a Goddess! Daughter of

Bharadvaja, does not every one yearn to hear the music of your foot-fall.

LOPAMUDRA: And yet (placing a finger on Agastya's chest) not a chord has stirred in this heart (sighs) He, who lives in my heart, does not let me live even in his eyes.

AGASTYA: You are right, I have not lost my strength. Leave me alone. You can make others mad if you like.

LOPAMUDRA (humbly). Why do you speak thus?

AGASTYA (with contempt): I see the fall of the Aryas in your irresponsible ways

LOPAMUDRA (with equal contempt). But, Agastya, you will never be a complete Arya till you accept me. I have known you these two months Leave your pride and consult your own heart. It will tell you the truth. (beseechingly) Why don't you listen to it?

AGASTYA (hands across his chest): Why do you lose your self-control? When the morning comes and you leave us, all that will be left with you will be the sorrow that you should have spoken thus.

LOPAMUDRA: Then I pray to Surya to stand still in his course, and let this night be long, of slow moving moments only. (with folded hands) Agastya, forget your pride I want you as the child wants its mother Come!

AGASTYA (licks his lip, steps aside and speaks harshly) Woman! Are you mad? Do you tempt me at this age? Who are you?

For a moment Lopamudra draws back Then, with a shake of the head, she throws modesty aside

LOPAMUDRA. Who am I? (in a triumphant tone and with love-lit eyes) Agastya, you have observed the laws eternal With an impetuous heart, you have maintained stern self-discipline! Darling of the Gods, by the splendour of your genius, you have overshadowed mighty

thrones. Why not then ask your own heart? If you love truth, tell me—me, who I am.

AGASTYA. Who are you? In you there are both heaven and hell. In you live Gods and demons and all (He looks at her as one mad and then speaks unsteadily) I hear the sighs of endless lovers still echoing in your ears. I hear the fetters which your kisses have fastened on many. (shuddering) From every pore of your body drips sensuality. You are voluptuousness itself, which always tempts but never tires.

LOPAMUDRA (sadly). Proud man! Why do you discover your own sensuality in me? I am devoted to those who love me. I am the poetry of my poets (with anguish) But I had no idea that you thought me but a wanton Have you finished? I will now tell you, once and for all, who I am Vain man! Go and wander over all the three worlds, but you will never find a mate like me (beseechingly) Why are you so blind? (slowly) Who am I? Can't you recognise Vishvaratha? Don't you see our efforts blossoming in his thoughts and deeds and in his wide-seeing vision? Agastya, his vision and his inspiration are your creation and mine If you are not too blind to see what a man we have shaped, why do you want to waste our joint creative art?

She sobs and sits down on a footstep Agastya looks like one dazed She gazes sadly at Agastya who covers his eyes with his hands

AGASTYA (opening his eyes and coming nearer): I am caught in your net like a bird—thou image of sensuality!

LOPAMUDRA. Agastya, I have given you everything. I shall listen to whatever you have to say But, in this life, you are my only God Come—come with me

AGASTYA (unsteadily) No, no, never

LOPAMUDRA (sadly). Will it be said that Lopamudra

loved but one man and he would not have her? No, Mother Sarasvati, it is impossible. Bear me witness. (slowly and with determination) Agastya, you look cold now, but your heart is flaming like molten gold. You may leave me now, but you will come back and follow me. You do not accept my heart, but you shall return with an offer of your own. You do not give me your love, but you will beg for my love at midnight.

Ugra, Shambara's daughter, is delivered of a son. Lopamudra, who anticipates a civil war if the son survives, has him exchanged for the dead child of Ajigarta, one of Agastya's pupils.

She then goes to bid goodbye to Vishvaratha and assures him that she will induce Agastya to accept Shambara's daughter as an Arya at any cost.

VISHVARATHA: If my Guru blesses me, I will never let you go. Only you can inspire me. Who will lead me from darkness into light?

LOPAMUDRA. Son, I shall wander where I must. My memory will inspire you more than my words. Vishvaratha, wherever I may be, I shall always be yours—always your Mother.

Then she gives him a parting message: "Let not the lure of thrones come upon you. Gone are all emperors, Manu and Yayati. Where are their sceptres? And their thrones, where are they? The sky-kissing towers they raised, where are they? They performed great exploits, but in darkness, wandering, what did they grasp but darkness?"

At midnight, she goes to the place where she expects Agastya, who has now decided to die, for Vishvaratha has declined to change his resolve. But he cannot resist the temptation of having a last look at Lopamudra.

LOPAMUDRA. It is midnight, and yet he is not come?

Won't he come? (thoughtfully) Sylvan Goddesses! Today I cannot invite you by my flute. I cannot welcome you with my dance, my feet refuse to move. (sighs) Won't he come? (in anguish) Flowering groves, why are you so fragrant? Birds, why do you swing on the branches, as you sleep? Waves, why do you dance as you go by in such ecstasy? Agastya heeds me not—and my heart is getting hope-bereft.

AGASTYA (stepping forward, and in disgust): Awful beauty! Are you a woman? A demoness? A Goddess? Who are you?

LOPAMUDRA (with joy) He is come—my Agastya!

AGASTYA: Yes, I have come to see how you behave. Shall I hate you or myself?

LOPAMUDRA (humbly). Why Agastya? Do not speak thus; your love has brought you to me.

AGASTYA (shuddering): I now understand why you are so fascinating.

LOPAMUDRA (prayerfully): Agastya, the melodies I have heard are sweet, but still sweeter are the melodies I have yet to hear. (comes nearer and places her hand on Agastya's shoulders) Let me hear these. Here I am. I wait as if my soul were in my eyes—one-pointed

AGASTYA Lopamudra! Why do you harass me? Your lips, like bows well-drawn, tempt me. Your words leave no difference between good and evil.

LOPAMUDRA Agastya, why do you burn yourself and set fire to me? Don't you see my plight? Once I loved to be alone in this, my father's home. Sarasvati was then my only companion. She sang; I played my flute. Both of us sang in unison and my limbs were like waves. My hair blew high like sprays of water; my hands and feet flung themselves high and low; and the tide of joy was in me. To the voice of birds, I danced.

AGASTYA (looking at her, dazed) · Lopamudra, you are wonderful.

LOPAMUDRA: No, I am not. All that is gone. My song and smile are meaningless without you Love has reduced me to ashes. I am thirsty for your lips, for your arms.

AGASTYA (closing his eyes): Image of light divine! You are making me blind Demoness, Goddess, best of Rishis, whatever you are, I fall at your feet Free me—let me go. I cannot bear this pain and anguish.

LOPAMUDRA: Then, my lord, why do you suffer them? (opening her arms) Give me the nectar of life Accept me as your forefathers accepted their consorts.

AGASTYA (unable to maintain self-control): Do you speak the truth? Or are you a wanton wanting to enslave me?

LOPAMUDRA · Distrustful! Do you doubt me still? When I see you, every glade becomes a paradise of flowers; every tree shines with dewy gems; on every pathway glisten the footprints of the Gods, and the breezes of their abode whistle in my heart.

AGASTYA (comes nearer and stops abruptly): But, but what will Vasishtha say? And the Bharatas? They will say that you enslaved me as you did the rest.

LOPAMUDRA If you do not dare to accept me for fear of the world, there is none so blind as you. (with pain) Love is the great, eternal law. And if you cannot see things in that light—then—O Best among the ascetics, leave me

AGASTYA · What will you do?

LOPAMUDRA: I? (sits on a stone, weeping) I shall live on the memory of the love-torn Agastya as I saw him tonight. I will wander farther and farther, away from the Aryas, with your name on my lips And years hence, when the burning anguish of my heart shall have but left

only the ashes of memory—I shall come and live in this grove again. (Agastya comes near. She speaks amid sobs). Then your memory shall be like the stars on a quiet night and with their mild sweet light, they will illumine the depths of my heart. I shall sing alone, and in my songs I will pour out the desolation of my heart; and those will be songs such as the Sun never heard before. (breaks down) With lips hungry for your kisses, with arms impatient for yours, I, I will wend my weary way to the Land of Death (covers her face with her hands).

AGASTYA: Lopamudra! (She does not look up).

LOPAMUDRA: (sobbing) Go!

AGASTYA: Look up. My blood is on fire. (slowly places his hand on her head). My heart is caught in your soft hair

LOPAMUDRA: Do not get caught, I pray you. You know how to command, not to beg. You know power, not love. It has not been given to you to taste the joy which comes from complete surrender (covers her face with her hands).

AGASTYA (touching her cheek): Lopamudra, what spring created these rose-petals? What God gave you the glory of your youth? Look, I am drunk with your words and I am more thirsty than ever. Look at me. (lifts her head) Agastya surrenders I want to follow you; I am like the dust which follows your footfall.

LOPAMUDRA (with half-closed eyes): Lord, my eyes, full of dreams, are blinded by your splendour. We are alone Only the sky is above us; we are clothed in moon-beams (closes her eyes) Take me away, to distant solitudes, to forest-glades, across mountains and rivers. Look—look—look at the star! It is like the essence of your splendour It will show us the way We shall teach crags and sands to sing—to sing the songs of our love.

Then Lopamudra begs of him a boon. Vishvaratha was their child in spirit. He should be allowed to live.

Suddenly Agastya remembers his vow and draws back saying .

“Darling mine, awake from your dreams Our paths must run apart. If my life is a falsehood, I have no right to live.”

But before he goes, Bhairava, the High-Priest of Ugrakala, who had disappeared from Shambara’s fort when the Aryans entered it, suddenly steps forward from the darkness and stabs Lopamudra, who sinks to the ground Bhairava then attacks Agastya

At this juncture Vishvaratha comes from behind and catches hold of Bhairava Rohini comes and informs them that some one has stabbed Ugra to death

Bhairava laughs gleefully “I killed her—she who betrayed Ugrakala Here is another And here a third—” and he flings himself on Vishvaratha. Vishvaratha throws him down and kills him with his knife. He dies with the name of Ugrakala on his lips

Agastya lifts the wounded Lopamudra in his arms. Divodasa and Vasishtha enter Lopamudra opens her eyes, sees Agastya, and with both hands clings to him in embrace.

VASISHTHA (sternly) · Brother, what’s this?

AGASTYA (overpowered with emotion) · Vasishtha, she is mine. The Gods gave her to me.

Vishvamitra Rishi

Vishvaratha is crushed physically and mentally by the death of Ugra He insists on her being cremated according to Aryan rites so that she may go to *Pitriloka*, the Land of his Manes Some of the Bharatas protest but Vishvaratha is insistent.

Jamadagni supports Vishvaratha and asks his followers to prepare the funeral pyre in front of the mansion and close to the place where the Sarasvati flows past. This done, he carries Ugra's mortal remains which he ties up together in a deer-skin, to the river, bathes them with the proper rituals in the sacred waters and places them on the pyre. Then he comes and fetches Vishvaratha and begins to invoke the God of Fire to receive Ugra in His flaming hands.

The sun is about to rise and Vishvaratha is ready to perform the funeral rites when Riksha is seen coming up to them leading a large crowd of Dasyus, shouting "Victory unto the Lord of Bharatas! Victory unto Rishi Riksha." Riksha in a drunken fit had gone to the high field surrounded by thorn hedges in which the Dasyus had been kept confined by the victorious Tritsus and, claiming to be their High-Priest, had set them free. Among the prisoners was Sura, the little Dasyu wench, to whom he had made love in the fort of Shambara. Riksha and Sura come and fall at Vishvaratha's feet as do all those who could. There are shouts and wailings of "Lord of Bharatas, save us. Make us Aryas."

For a moment, Vishvaratha could not believe his eyes. But Riksha folds his hands and says: "Lord of the Bharatas, these unhappy Dasyus have come to you to be saved. Lift them, oh great Bharata, from their wretchedness. Bring down upon them the blessings of the mighty Gods. Let the *Gayatri*, which Lord Surya gave to you, make them Aryas."

Tears run down the cheeks of Vishvaratha as he sees the uplifted faces and prayerful hands of these wretched men and women, who had once treated him so hospitably when they were free, who have come to him in search of salvation. He feels that his place is with them, nay, that

he is one of them. "Come, my brothers and sisters, you are Shambara's people. Your Princess and my Queen has gone to join my Manes, but I am here and I will do all I can for you".

The crowd looks at the dead body of their beloved Princess lying on the pyre and a cry of anguish rises from every throat.

Now come Tritsu horsemen riding fast. They have heard the news that the Dasyu prisoners have broken out of the prison and are marching on Tritsugram. One of them even rushes with sword uplifted towards the crowd which surrounds Vishvaratha. But as he comes near, Pratardana, the Bharata general, lets fly an arrow and the rider falls from his horse, which breaks away.

The Tritsu horsemen, who are coming at full gallop, raise their battle cry and fall on the Dasyus. As they come, Jamadagni also issues the order, and the Bharatas and the Bhrigus attack them. The clash of steel and shouts of victory mingle with the shrieks of the wounded and the affrighted.

Prince Sudasa hears of the desecration of the sacred banks of the Sarasvati; of the intended invocation of the God of Fire to take Ugra to the Land of the Manes and of the escape of the Dasyus. Vishvaratha is his life-long enemy and according to him, the cause of all the woes that have overtaken the Aryas. His blood is up and he spurs his horse towards the pyre in front of which Vishvaratha stands in silent sorrow.

When Sudasa comes near Vishvaratha, he jumps from his horse and with sword in hand, rushes towards the pyre. Quick as lightning, Pratardana places his sword in Vishvaratha's hands and on the other hand tries to arrest the progress of Sudasa. Sudasa stands glaring at Vishvaratha "Brother, has it come to this?" asks Vishvaratha

sorrowfully "Shall we destroy each other? What are you doing? Listen to me, if you try to touch the pyre, I shall not spare you."

Crowds of fighting Bharatas, Tritsus and Bhrigus swirl around the funeral pyre. In the meantime, the tide has risen fast and swift in the Sarasvati, and the waters have reached the pyre. Jamadagni means to take no risks. Lifting the remains of Ugra tied up in the skin of an antelope and carrying them into knee-deep waters he, with appropriate ritual, sets them afloat. To the amazement of all, the sacred river swiftly bears away the daughter of Shambara in her arms.

In the meantime, old Divodasa hurries to the place where Vishvaratha and Sudasa stand glaring at each other, parted only by Pratardana. Expecting his father's intervention, Sudasa rushes at Vishvaratha. But he is no match for the latter's skill; an adroit stroke on the part of Vishvaratha, and the sword of Sudasa falls from his grasp.

"My son, my son, what are you doing?" shouts Divodasa

But before he can receive a reply, wild cries, as if from a thousand throats are heard from Tritsugram. Every one turns to look back. Flames are leaping up to the sky from the bamboo houses. The whole settlement has been set on fire by the Dasyu prisoners. The Tritsus forget the Dasyus and their murderous intentions, and rush pell-mell to save their homes.

Vishvaratha and Jamadagni work day and night to save the Tritsus from the fire and give them shelter, food and clothing. They help the Tritsus to rebuild their settlement on a grander scale, and in this noble effort, they spare neither their strength nor wealth.

Agastya makes his intentions clear. Once he is

wedded to Lopamudra and after Rohini has been married to Vishvaratha, he means to relinquish his office as High-Priest of the Tritsus, to leave Saptasindhu and to teach man, wherever he lives, the supremacy of Rita.

Thereafter Vasishtha would assume the sacred office of the High-Priest of the Tritsus. This prospect makes Vasishtha shudder. What an office for him to fill, with Sudasa, whom the Tritsus love not, as the successor of Divodasa; with the Tritsus looking upon Vishvaratha, who had fallen from Rita, as their saviour and with numerous Tritsus having taken Dasyu women as their wives. Such an office holds no lure for Vasishtha.

The life of Vasishtha, the Master of Silence, is based on the faith that the Aryas alone can establish the law of Rita, the rule of *Satya*, *Tapas* and the sacred *Vak* among men. But alas, when they mix with the Dasyus, they forget their heritage and fall from their high estate. He leaves Tritsugram alone in the early morning and goes away beyond the river Sarasvati.

Sudasa tells his father with brutal frankness that Vishvaratha is his enemy. The Bharata king is undermining his position with the Tritsus. He himself will leave Tritsugram unless Vishvaratha is forced to go to his own kingdom. Divodasa, with tears and expressions of deep regret, tells Vishvaratha of the wishes of Sudasa. Vishvaratha agrees to leave Tritsugram as soon as he is married.

The marriage ceremony of Vishvaratha and Rohini takes place. Agastya and Lopamudra give away the bride and old Richika officiates as the father of the bride-groom. Vishvaratha and Rohini, hand in hand, go round the sacred fire seven times and become the bone and breath of each other.

It is time to go. The auspicious moment arrives. Vishvaratha tells his mother, Ghosha, who comes to take him

to their capital that his feet refuse to move. He looks at the Lord of Light, Savita, and says that he cannot leave Tritsugram, because his eyes are blinded and he cannot see the light.

Lopamudra puts her hand on Vishvaratha's shoulder with a view to take him into the chariot but Vishvaratha gazes at the Sun saying: "Lord of the Three Steps, I cannot leave this place."

Vishvaratha tells Lopamudra. "You said to me once, Mother, 'Manu has gone; and so has Yayati. Where are their sceptres now?' Why should I let it turn into fetters for me. Let me throw it away, mother. I cannot leave my people."

The people wait in breathless awe. He turns to Lopamudra and his mother and says that he wants to go to the Gomantaka Hill for a day so that he may commune with the Gods and the *Pitrīs* there and they may show him the way.

Vishvaratha hands over his diadem and sword to Pratardana and begins to walk mechanically towards the hill. The crowd stands hushed as the lonely figure climbs the little Gomantaka Hill nearby.

Sudasa seeks the help of Somaka in his attempt to destroy Vishvaratha.

"Fool, you cannot keep Vishvaratha back. It is impossible, unthinkable," says Somaka contemptuously. "Do what we all do. He is the rising sun. Bow down to him. Offer him *arghya*; shine in his glory. When it is blazing mid-day for him, seek a safe shelter. When the evening comes and he begins to set, the world will be yours."

Sudasa is deeply hurt but he sees the truth of what the shrewd old King had said. He decides not to go against Vishvaratha when he is at the zenith of his power.

While this sudden change of intentions is overtaking

Prince Sudasa, Vishvaratha has been sitting under a tree on the Gomantaka Hill, praying to the Gods. It is mid-day; then evening; then darkness; and he is praying still.

With the night, the Seven Ancient Fathers begin to rise on the horizon, twinkling with their fadeless lustre. Vishvaratha continues to pray to the Gods. He wants them to show the way. He surrenders himself completely to them, concentrating his mind on hearing their mandate.

“Weak man! Devoid of faith. Neither the Gods nor the *Pitrīs* can help thee as thou art.

“Give up desire: Lift up thy life. Steady thy feet.

“Plant thy feet firm on each moment as it passes, and fix thy gaze on the truth which it spells.

“Offer you all to that moment. Fail not for sorrow; falter not for sin. Live in that moment, master it, make it your own.

“Each moment then will show you the way to the next. Like unto the rays of Lord Savita, it will light up the path of truth. Like unto the Creator, it will create forms of beauty.

“Thus thou shalt have the vision of the Sages.”

The voices of the Ancients die away. Vishvaratha feels dazed. “But how, how? Let me know how?

Now a new voice is to be heard, not mellifluous as were the voices of the *Pitrīs*, but stern and imperative. And he knows it to be the voice of Lord Varuna, the mighty God.

“I declare to thee Rita, Eternal Order, supreme and stern. Born at the beginning of time, it rules over Truth in speech and action. Its path the wicked never dare to tread.

“Gods themselves sing of Rita. By Rita alone the mighty Indra, the Lord of the Thunderbolt, shines and by shining makes all things to shine. His steeds are yoked by its eternal order.

"Agni, the Lord of Wonders, gives to man by Rita alone the wonder-working joy which moves the voice of the singer and stirs the hearts of heroes.

"I, the million-eyed and all-pervading, uphold the world by Rita alone. Through it alone, I know, the rays of Savita, the Lord of Light, gladden the earth at dawn. Through it, I am the Singer, dispensing sacred chants. Through it, I create things of beauty.

"Firm are the foundations of the Law Eternal, for it supports the splendour of beauteous things."

Then one voice, more powerful than the rest—that of his guardian God, Savita—is heard speaking in accents of command.

"Arise Vishvamitra! Fill the Seven Worlds with your strength. Be the Lord of the far-spreading vision. Triumph over time

"Divine Singer! Speak the Truth Live the *Tapas*; cherish beauty. Unfold Rita in thy life.

As the voice dies, Vishvaratha faints in sheer ecstacy.

When dawn was on the point of breaking, and Vishvaratha had not yet returned, Rohini climbs the Hill with the faithful Dasyu servant, Vrika. They see Vishvaratha lying unconscious on the ground. Rohini thinks that he is dead and wails but Vrika invokes his new-found Gods as well as his old God, Ugrakala and Vishvaratha slowly regains consciousness, opens his eyes and recognises Rohini. Then he says "I have met them all, the Devas and *Pitrīs*. Rita is all and I have been asked to establish its sovereignty over all the worlds."

He assures Rohini that he will come back. Rohini clings to his feet and says: "I know you are a *Mahārishi*. Your light shall outshine those of the Seven Fathers."

The return of the Vishvaratha brings Agastya, Lopamudra, Mother Ghosha and King Divodasa on the scene

and they all see Visvaratha stepping down, staff in hand, with Rohini by his side and Vrika behind.

Every one shouts 'Victory to the Bharatas' and Vishvaratha comes down and falls at the feet of Agastya and the other elders, saying that he has been commanded by the Gods and *Pitrīs* to some back and live in Rita. Agastya lifts him up and says that he is no longer worthy for Vishvaratha to fall at his feet Lopamudra hugs him to her heart and also embraces Rohini He then falls at his mother's feet who is shedding tears of joy

Sudasa pushes his way through the crowd, and falls at Vishvaratha's feet and begs forgiveness for his sins This surprises the people beyond belief. Vishvaratha lifts him up and says. "You are guilty of no offence But for you, I should not have been what I am, and the Gods and *Pitrīs* would not have accepted me as theirs."

Then Sudasa, with hands folded, appeals to Vishvaratha.

"Then Vishvaratha—I must not say 'Vishvaratha'; I shall say Vishvamitra as all my Tritsus say—let me beg of you one favour. You are a great Rishi. Accept the office of the High-Priest of the Tritsus Gurudev is going, the Master of Silence is gone, no one is more worthy of being the *purohit* of the Tritsus than yourself And please, father, join me in my prayer "

Everyone is agreeably stunned by this strange and unexpected request which finds a willing echo in every heart for that is the only way to avert the internecine strife which threatens the allied Bharatas and Tritsus Vishvaratha stands hesitant when Sudasa requests him not to say 'No'.

Agastya steps forward and says that the Gods have spoken through the mouth of Sudasa "Divodasa wants

you to be his *purohit*. So do all the Tritsus. You are already the Maharshi who has given new life to the Dasyus."

Vishvaratha folds his hands, prays silently for a moment and says in a whisper: "Great shining Ones, I obey. Let me serve ye. Give me the strength to establish the sway of Rita." And weighed by the responsibility he has undertaken, he falls at the feet of his Master and asks for his blessings when the crowds shout in joy "Victory unto Vishvamitra "

Lomaharshini

I

The next part begins after some twenty years. Vishvamitra has been for seventeen years the High-Priest of the allied tribes, the Tritsus and the Bharatas. He is now accepted by many as the greatest of Aryan Rishis.

Jamadagni, the Bhrigu sage, has also his ashram in Tritsugram where learning and the martial arts are cultivated.

Sudasa has kept his irrepressible jealousy of Vishvamitra under severe control and has so far seen no way of shaking off his leadership of the Tritsus and the Bharatas, which, though spiritual, is equally temporal. In Tritsugrama, Aryas and Dasyus live a life in which Dasyus serve powerful Aryas and Aryas associate freely with Dasyu princes, principal among whom is Bheda, son of Shambara and brother of Ugra. Though Vishvamitra has provided him with a small principality, he was brought up in Tritsugram. He lives there a gay life, riding fine horses and treating Aryas lavishly. Many Aryas live on his generosity, hate him in their hearts and suffer him on account of the great Vishvamitra who had made Tritsugram practically the capital of Aryavarta.

Sudasa has no children. The next in succession is a cousin, Krishashva, son of Haryashva, married to Shashiyashi, daughter of King Somaka. Bheda carries on a secret love affair with her. Every one knows about it, but none cares to confess that he knows. And, following Shashiyashi, several Aryan women had taken Dasyus as husbands or as lovers.

Lomaharshini, the younger sister of Sudasa, an impassionable slip of a girl, is fifteen years old. She lives freely like a boy and dotes on Rama, several years her junior. Rama is the fourth son of Jamadagni, the Bhrigu sage. This boy, big and supple-limbed, handsome as a God, was from his birth claimed jealously in turn by his mother, Renuka, by Loma who lived with him day and night; and by old Kavi, generally called Vriddha, master of the martial art of Richika. This old man, gaunt and stern, commander of the allied forces of the Tritsus, Bharatas and Bhrigus, insisted on bringing up Rama in the tradition of the ancient Bhrigus. He held his present chief, Jamadagni, who had forsaken arms, in silent contempt.

Though nominally a king, Sudasa's life is one long tale of frustration which the proximity of the great Vishvamitra has brought about. The latter no doubt has made the Tritsu-Bharatas the strongest power in Aryavarta, but now Sudasa wishes to be a ruler in his own right.

The only way to get rid of Vishvamitra is to make Vasishtha accept the office of High-Priest, but Vasishtha, with his pupils, had gone into a forest years ago and had established a hermitage which had come to be a centre of high learning and stern self-discipline. Sudasa had invited him to come back again and again but the sage had refused the offer, because the Gods with whom he communed daily had not sanctioned the step.

II

Sudasa now goes to him again and begs of him to come back. Vasishtha, steadfast in his outlook on Aryan purity, promises to ask the advice of the Gods only if Sudasa issues ordinances prohibiting all promiscuous relations between Aryas and Dasyus and ordering the destruction of all Dasyus who carried on with Arya women.

Sudasa returns to Tritsugram and issues the ordinances. In order to prepare for the coming war with the Bharatas, he also decides to marry his sister Loma to Arjuna, styled the Arjuna with a Thousand Arms, whose sway extended over countries south of Aryavarta even upto the jungle settlement on the Narmada. His capital was called Mahishmati and was situated on the banks of that river (near modern Broach). But Loma makes fun of the proposal and when Sudasa slaps her, her perpetual companion, little Rama of fearless strength, charges him like a wild bull with his head lowered

The edicts are issued Arya boys in a body go about killing Dasyus who are the husbands or lovers of Arya women and destroying their houses They also find out the place where Bheda meets Shashiyashi surreptitiously.

But the old commander, Vriddha, comes to know of this intended raid He goes to the rendezvous, warns the lovers and asks Bheda to leave for his capital with his followers He also brings Shashiyashi to his palace When the raid is made, Bheda is not to be found and Shashiyashi is safely in the royal palace

Sudasa's Queen then goes to the hermitage of Vasishtha to pay her respects She is accompanied by Shashiyashi Vasishtha, silent and modest, sits gazing into the sacrificial fire, waiting for a mandate from the Gods He meets the Queen and her party and comes to the bank of the river to see them off in a boat.

On a hill nearby stands Bheda with his party, ready to rush post-haste to his capital to escape the wrath of the Tritsus.

He sees his beloved but a few yards away in the company of Vasishtha and the Queen and cannot restrain himself. He gallops down the hill, snatches Shashiyashi, puts her on his saddle, and, before people realise what has happened, disappears with her in a cloud of dust.

Bheda had committed a sacrilege according to the canons of Arya life. He had drawn his sword, kidnapped a woman from a hermitage in the presence of the noblest Rishi in Aryavarta.

Vasishtha, at that moment, receives a message from God Varuna. Aryavarta must be purged of this dreadful sin. He accepts, not the priesthood of the Tritsus, but the High-Priesthood of all the Aryas. He returns to Tritsugram to launch a crusade against the dire sin which required swift expiation.

"My sons," he tells his disciples, "go and announce in all the ashrams of Vasishtha that the Gods have given me today the priesthood of all Aryavarta to destroy non-Aryas and to rescue the Aryas. I have pledged my word to carry out their will. Destroy Bheda and purify the land. Boatman, take me to Tritsugram."

III

Little Rama was a prodigy. His mother called him God Varuna. Loma would not live a minute without him. Old Vriddha, the great general, tried to teach him every art he knew, the art of archery, of breeding horses, and of using and making arms.

Vriddha's son, Vimad, is appointed tutor to Rama. The little boy speaks little, carries himself like a young lion, and is the centre of fierce love and hatred.

When Rama is nine, Jamadagni, the sage, learned and wise, decides to send him to school in Vishvamitra's hermitage, famed as the greatest seat of learning in Aryavarta. Vriddha is adamant. Three sons, he says, Jamadagni has turned into men of learning. Now, the fourth son was his, to be trained as warrior, like unto his mighty ancestors, Shukra, Chyavana and Richika. The old man refuses to part with Rama, but Jamadagni is firm in his resolve to make a Rishi out of his son.

In his wrath, Vriddha leaves his chief's hermitage without any message for Bhrigugram, the original settlement of the Bhrigus. If Rama is taken away from him, he will no longer obey the chief of his tribe and will go into retirement. Little Rama's mind is, however, working differently. His Vriddha has gone away. He will, however, not remain apart from him. At night he steals away from his mother's side, brings out his little horse and rides forth in the dark night to meet Vriddha, through dense jungles, without knowing the way. Rama has a unique gift: He can see in darkness and he is incapable of fear. He rides the whole night.

In the morning he gets down to bathe his pony and to have a bath, and is captured by a party of Dasyus going on a pilgrimage. They tie him to a horse and beat him for his resistance. The party then goes up a mountain for several days and rests at night in front of the peak on which a shrine is situated. At night there is a feast, and Rama tied with ropes, sees his beloved pony killed, cooked and eaten by the party.

When the party is asleep, in silent, concentrated wrath Rama pulls himself near the fire and frees his hands by burning a part of the knot which binds them. Then he gets free, and slowly crawls up to the peak, where the dreaded

Ugrakala stood amid heaps of decaying bones of sacrificial victims.

Fearless, he tries to find a way, but on three sides, the peak sloped down perpendicularly into a ravine.

His absence is soon detected by the party which comes up the hill in search of him. Rama goes over the precipice and suspends himself in mid-air by holding on to the roots of a tree. Then, grasping one tree after another, he slowly lowers himself into the ravine and plunges into the torrent.

The next day he is picked up by a boat belonging to a family of Panis who carry on a small trade by selling sundry wares up and down the river Sarasvati. The Panis also carry on the business of stealing good-looking boys and selling them. Rama, along with two other boys, is locked up in a box made in the hull of the boat.

Shunashepa, one of his companions, older than him by a few years, is a very handsome boy. Rama takes to him immediately and learns from him that the Panis intend selling them.

The boys are kept for watch on the boat at night, and locked up in the box during day. When Rama tells Shunashepa who he is, the other boy stands away and is in tears. When asked to explain, he takes a promise from Rama that he will not forsake him even if he knows who he is. Rama promises. Shunashepa then tells him that he is the son of a *patita*, an accursed Bhrigu, a member of the clan of which Jamadagni, Rama's father, is the head. Shunashepa narrates his story.

"My father is Ajigarta, a Bhrigu by birth. The sage Agastya has laid him under a curse, he is a fallen, a *patita*; and we cannot stay in any Arya settlement. If we do, we are mercilessly beaten and driven off."

"But before my father became 'accursed' he was a learned man. Now he is addicted to every vice. But when

he is dead drunk, he chants the most beautiful *mantras*. When I came to understand what he chanted, I grew restless, and an urge to acquire learning and be a Rishi took possession of me. My brothers were dull, and my mother's hope of some day getting Agastya to lift the curse came to be centred in me.

"Once, for days, we had nothing to eat; wherever we went, people drove us away. We had to live on the birds that we killed. And if we had no food to eat, how could we get wine for my father? And as we had no wine, I could not learn anything more, and my father began to beat us all.

"Once my father beat me almost to death. Then he sold me to a party of Panis and bought wine in exchange. The Panis carried me away in their boat.

"My father was my teacher. Without him I went almost crazy. I therefore cried incessantly, and the annoyed Panis beat me. Tired of this life, I ventured to invoke God Varuna, even though, for one accursed like me, it was a sin. The Panis, hearing me chant the *mantras*, grew merciful and set me free.

"My father, so long as the stock of wine lasted, chanted the *mantras* and I learnt them at his feet. I was happy beyond dreams.

"When the stock of wine was over, my difficulties began. Without any opportunity to acquire further learning, I became miserable. Then my mother and brothers discovered a way by which I could complete my education. They sold me to a new Pani for a stock of wine. Then they hid it from my father. I lived with the Panis for a day or two as before. Then I chanted the *mantras*. The Panis, afraid of the Gods molesting them, let me go. I then came back to my mother. She made my father drink. And I resumed my studies. Thus have I studied time after time."

"In a few years," he added, "I will complete my education. I will then go to the great Agastya and get him to remove his curse. I will live in a Rishi's hermitage and finish my education."

Shunashepa is in tears as he concludes his story. Rama, with his direct simplicity, does not understand how such a fine boy has to sell himself again and again to learn what is a free gift in his father's hermitage, and he promises to remove the curse when he himself becomes a Rishi. The boat of the Panis wends leisurely down the holy Sarasvati. But one day they find the old Pani looking at Rama significantly; Shunashepa also hears them chuckling at the thought of having got hold of the son of a great man. It appears that the Panis want to take the boat back so that the old Pani can go alone and strike a bargain for the great man's son.

Rama and Shunashepa steal away from the boat when the Pani, his wife and sons are making merry at a feast. Rama, whose sight can pierce darkness, takes Shunashepa by the hand through the jungle.

They part near a settlement, for Shunashepa dare not come near it. And Rama impatient to meet Vriddha takes the forest path to Bhrigugram.

In Bhrigugram the old warrior, Vriddha is pining for his Rama. He had learnt that Rama had left his father to come to him, but had not been heard of since. The Bhrigus, under his direction, had scoured the forests for days in search of him but he was not to be found. Vriddha was heart-broken. He spoke to none. Only, sometimes tears welled up in his eyes and he cried out for Rama in the anguish of his disconsolate heart.

One night he was walking alone on a bank of the Sarasvati, lost in despair. Suddenly he hears a voice, coming from the forest. "Vriddha, Vriddha" The

beloved voice, his boy's voice, but full of pain and anguish, interrupted by the angry growl of a wolf. Vriddha rushes into the forest. He hears the stifled groans of the wolf and the sinking, broken voice of his beloved Rama. He runs to where the voice came from. There lies the wolf, dead. Rama is in a dead faint, badly wounded. In a life and death struggle, the nine year old lad, bleeding from every limb, had strangled the wolf to death.

IV

The Gods were cruel to Vishvamitra, the noblest Rishi in all Aryavarta.

In twenty years he had revolutionised the sacrificial lore of the Aryas. Human offerings had been given up. Now the sacrificial fire, which brought the Gods to men, was, due to the teachings of the sage, a source of inspiration. And Vishvamitra, the great Rishi, the mighty Bharata, now presided over sacrifices, which were rituals of purity.

King Harischandra propitiated the God Varuna and secured the boon of a son, but on a fearful condition.

The son, the great God had demanded, had to be offered in sacrifice when he grew up. Harischandra had parleyed with the God and gained time. Now his son, Rohita, was getting into fine manhood and the father had no heart to offer him as a votive offering; but the God was angry and wanted the plighted word to be kept. In punishment for the breach of promise, Harischandra was visited by a fell disease. Either he must give up his son, or give up his life—such was the edict of the all-seeing Varuna, the mightiest of the Gods.

In distress, Harischandra sought the intervention of Vishvamitra, master of the sacrificial lore. If human sacrifice was a sin, as the sage had taught, how could the

great God Varuna demand it? If it was not, Vishvamitra had been teaching Aryas a false doctrine.

Vishvamitra saw the force of the argument and took up the challenge of Varuna to demand human sacrifice.

"Great ones," he asked the gods, "are my teachings untrue? If so, I cannot live. If they are true, how can you demand the sacrifice of Rohita?"

Vishvamitra, with Jamadagni, the Bharata chiefs and other kings who looked up to him as their High Priest, came to Harischandra's capital and began the sacrificial session. The sage prayed to the Gods. "Was his life's mission true or false?" he asked the God again and again. And the only reply was that king Harischandra grew worse. God Varuna wanted a human sacrifice; that was clear.

Ultimately, the God relents. He will accept a substitute for Rohita. In consequence, the news goes round, far and wide, that king Harischandra wants a boy, for the price of a hundred cows, to be sacrificed in place of Rohita.

Ajigarta, the accursed, wandering in out-of-the-way places, hears the news. He also hears that Vishvamitra is to be the presiding Rishi at the sacrifice. And he smiles with malice. Now is his chance to get rich and also to escape from Agastya's curse. He comes to king Harischandra's capital with his family and sells Shunashepa for a hundred cows, to be offered in sacrifice as a substitute for Rohita.

Vishvamitra tells Jamadagni and his wife Rohini that he has made up his mind to defy the Gods to stand up for the truth as he sees it, and to end his life ere he allowed a human sacrifice to be performed, which would undo his life's work.

But no one can be found to bind Shunashepa to the

sacrificial post. Strangely, his father, Ajigarta, is ready to do it for a fee of another hundred cows.

To Vishvamitra, frustrated in his life's mission and preparing to vindicate his mission by his own self-invited doom, comes the wretched Ajigarta and tells his story.

He was Agastya's pupil, Vishvamitra's own tutor. When he was young, Lopamudra had ordered him to substitute his own dead child for Ugra's son, for she was afraid that Vishvamitra's son by a Dasyu wife would be the cause of a civil war among the Bharatas. Ajigarta had stolen the son, but had refused to hand him over to Lopamudra. On that Agastya, the sage, had cursed him and he had lost his status.

Ajigarta had brought up the boy. It was Shunashepa. And he offered to Vishvamitra that if he was provided with two thousand cows and an ashram and if the curse on him was raised he would refuse to tie Shunashepa to the sacrificial post or to kill him and thus save the boy and Vishvamitra's reputation.

The sage is angry. He refuses to be blackmailed and drives the blackguard away. When going away, Ajigarta threatens the sage that he will disclose the parentage of Shunashepa the following day.

But, later, a conflict goes on in the sage's heart. If he discloses Shunashepa's identity, there cannot be a sacrifice, for he is the son of a Dasyu woman and the God will not save Harischandra. His life's mission will fail and the proud Bharatas will feel disgraced. A civil war will follow. He will lose his office and his primacy among the Aryan sages. He will fall and the nobility of Arya life which he has built up will fall with him. If, on the other hand, he does not disclose the identity of Shunashepa, the boy will be sacrificed, but he himself would retain his high position, his followers and his work.

The sage struggles with his soul and triumphs in the end. He decides to stand by truth and disclose the identity of Shunashepa and invite civil war and his ignominious fall.

"There is only one way to sacrifice a man. An ascetic must make an offering of himself. The sacrificial fire can only be of his own truth. He must embrace the flame of fearlessness "

Vishvamitra sees all this clearly. With head erect, he looks on all sides. He destroys the serpent of Fear. He stands on its dead body as the God Indra had done before him. He challenges the Gods.

"If you want to enforce untruth, you may. But Vishvamitra will stand by his truth. He will not move from his position whatever may happen."

He looks up. He sees Lopamudra looking down upon him in indescribable splendour. No, no, it is Mother Sarasvati, the source of all knowledge and strength. She encompasses the heavens, uplifting the universe with her grace and beauty.

Next day, during the sacrificial ritual, a wonderful thing happens. Shunashepa is tied by Ajigarta to the post; but as the final *mantras* are being recited, he sees coming towards him Rama, his boyhood friend, now a godlike youth. He had lived all these years in the happy memory of the friend whom he believed to be God Varuna. And now he comes in flesh and blood to save him. Out of sheer joy, he sings fresh *mantras*, beautifully divine. The assembly is awe-struck at such a miracle. The bonds which bind Shunashepa to the sacrificial post fall off, and, as he falls, Vishvamitra takes him up in his arms. And, lo and behold, the Gods vindicate Vishvamitra's mission. Harischandra sighs, opens his eyes, and shows signs of recovery!

V

Vishvamitra has had a unique triumph but it has brought no peace to him. His wife, Rohini, is furious that the son of the Dasyu princess, Ugra, is alive and, being the elder, is likely to wrest the throne of the Bharatas from her son. The Bharatas are unhappy and dissatisfied. And soon comes news of Vasishtha's edicts, of Bheda's abduction of Shashiyashi, and of Vasishtha's re-entry into the political arena to rouse Aryavarta against Bheda and bring about his destruction.

The sage smiles at his difficulties and at the world by which he is surrounded. If an Arya kidnaps a woman he can be forgiven but not a Dasyu. If Shunashepa, a glorious little Rishi, had been the son of an Arya mother he would have been worshipped, the colour of his mother's skin made him a thing to be looked down upon and cursed.

Vishvamitra feels that the world is at war with his mission. He feels his place is with his own Truth and not with the work. He seats Rohini's son, Devadatta, on the throne of the Bharatas, gives up his office as High-Priest of the Tritsus and the Bharatas and, at night, unknown to everyone, goes into the forest to live his Truth. Shunashepa, who alone of others worships Vishvamitra, follows him.

VI

While Vishvamitra is occupied with the sacrificial session in Harischandra's capital, Súdasa is preparing for battle. He invites Arjuna of the Thousand Arms, to come to Aryavarta with his savage warriors. He comes, ready to marry Loma and destroy anyone who dares to disagree with him. But he hates the very atmosphere of Aryavarta. There are too many Rishis, too many rules of conduct, to

suit him. Impatiently, he comes half-way to meet Loma, who had arrived with Rama to Harischandra's sacrifice. On the way, Arjuna comes across the party which is accompanying Renuka, Rama and Loma, and captures them.

The capture of a Rishi's wife and son brings the indignant Bharatas and Bhrigus to their rescue. A fight ensues, and, anxious to avoid disaster, Arjuna escapes to Tritsugram; but, in doing so, he takes with him Rama and Loma, whom, however, he has not recognised as his bride-to-be.

When he returns to Tritsugram, Vasishtha sternly rebukes him for going on raids and capturing Renuka in defiance of the unalterable law of the Aryans which enjoins that learning and those who pursue it are inviolable. Jamadagni is angry and issues a ban that Loma shall not be married to Arjuna. Baffled, Arjuna wants to go back to his wild native country, but on learning that Loma is not a Rishi's daughter but King Sudasa's sister, his bride-to-be, he tries to molest her. Fiercely does the loyal Rama, though a mere boy, attack the redoubtable Arjuna. Arjuna, forgetting the fact that Rama is the son of Jamadagni, his High-Priest by right, tries to strangle the boy. Bhadrashrenya, his commander-in-chief, uncle and the feudatory chief of the Yadava tribe of Saurashtra, intervenes and saves Rama.

Arjuna is furious and orders that all of them should leave Aryavarta at once, taking away Loma with them. He then starts on the journey. Rama, though injured, insists on coming with Loma. Bhadrashrenya, the old feudatory, is glad that Sage Richika's grandson wants to come back to Saurashtra of his own sweet will and lift the curse which weighed heavily on his people. He takes Rama and Loma with him, but he is no longer their captor. His

heart has surrendered to the little High-Priest whom he is taking back to his land.

And thus the scene shifts from the Punjab to Gujarat.

Vasishtha, however, is unbending and inspires a crusade against Bheda. "The protection of Aryan purity, the destruction of non-Aryan wickedness"—that becomes his mission for the moment.

CHAPTER XI

AN EPIC OF THE ANCIENT ARYANS III

Bhagawan Parashurama

I

UNDER the shadow of Girnar in Saurashtra lives the Yadava tribe over which rules Bhadrashrenya. It is a small and poor tribe. Its greatness is due only to the fact that its chief, Bhadrashrenya, is the uncle of Arjuna, the Emperor, his guardian when he was a boy, and his right-hand man and the commander of his forces.

On his way back to his domains, Arjuna learns that Ravana has invaded his territories to the south of the Narmada. He straightway leaves for Mahishmati, his capital. But he is unforgiving to Bhadrashrenya and removes the old man from the post of commander, directing him meanwhile to hold Rama and Loma as prisoners till his return from the war.

Fierce Arjuna spends his time in an endless war, but his empire is administered by Bhadrashrenya, his uncle and commander; by his loyal mistress, Mriga, who once was a prostitute; and by Mrikunda, his High-Priest. Mrikunda is also Bhrigu—the family of priests cannot be changed—who was once an ignorant cabin-boy of a ship. Arjuna's grandfather, Mahishmat, elevated him to the dignity of a High-Priest, when Richika, the Bhrigu sage, left his tribe priestless, and no decent Bhrigu would come forward to accept the office of High-Priest to an ‘accursed ruler’ Mrikunda knows state-craft, but nothing about learning and rituals His disciple, Kukshi, is the High-Priest of the Yadavas and also, incidentally, a spy and an agent of Mrikunda.

The Yadava tribe is miserable. This year the rains have failed them and the rivers are running dry. As there is no water, the scorching sun takes its toll of cattle and children. To this tribe, Bhadrashrenya brings Rama, now a boy of fifteen, with blazing eyes and sealed lips, tall, well-built, trained in the arts of the Bhrigus, the warrior-priests. He moves, lofty and aloof, divinely calm. With him is his inseparable companion, living in and for him, Loma, small and shapely, dressed like a boy and proficient in the arts in which men excel. Bhadrashrenya introduces these two to his tribesmen and hopes to improve their fortunes by the presence of the grandson of the unforgotten Rishi who had left them because of their sins.

Rama, though young, is a geyser of energy. Fear is unknown to him. With the concentrated rapidity of lightning, he flings himself into any situation which, he feels, requires his intervention and enforces submission.

Soon after his arrival, he chastises Madhu, son of King Bhadrashrenya, who is a bully, and who is older than him. Quickly he evokes loyalty and inspires fear. Pratip, Bhadrashrenya's elder son, becomes his devoted follower. Kukshi, the High-Priest, now coming to know that Bhadrashrenya is in disgrace with Emperor Arjuna, wants to create difficulties for him. He attributes the shortage of water to Rama's inauspicious presence and works up a revolt in the tribe. Bhadrashrenya is firm and declines to leave the place, his faith in Rama remaining unshaken.

Rama's mind works in mysterious ways. He is Jambadagni's son, he is also a Rishi. What does God Varuna mean by withholding rains?

He climbs to the top of Girnar, invokes the aid of

God Varuna, and immediately the rains come down in torrents, allaying the thirst of the Yadavas.

Rama, aided by Loma, Pratip and a band of loyal workers, organises the boys of the tribe. He teaches them horse-breeding and the use of arms, for he was brought up by Vriddha, the master of the martial arts. He lays down strict rules of conduct and imposes stern punishment on the recalcitrant.

A woman runs away with a lover, Rama brings them back and ties them to a tree, to remain, for days, the laughing-stock of the whole tribe. His boys, armed and trained, go about imposing order on the highways, making tradesmen secure and obtaining, in return, horses and yet more horses. He invents new weapons, his favourite weapon being the battle-axe. He stops the nefarious man-hunt of the naga dwarfs by punishing the men who carry on the trade of catching them for sale. He is an elemental force. When he finds the aborigines maltreated and their women molested, he makes them his pupils and plants his ashram in their midst.

When the High-Priest's wife, Kalvini, madly in love with him, invites him to her bed, he horsewhips her.

Loma is a woman, Rama is a growing boy. She loves him; he takes her for granted. This little woman feels lonely and disconsolate, for Rama knows not the way of lovers, and when she sees the High-Priest's wife making love to Rama, she sobs broken-heartedly.

But the wild rapture which Rama sees in Kalvini's eyes suddenly awakens him to the fact that Loma should be his wife.

"Loma, that wicked Kalvini called me to her house on a false pretext."

"And then?" Loma's heart beats fast

"She stood before me without any clothes, ready to embrace me "

"Oh!"

"I took the whip and slashed on her breasts and hips. Now she will carry the scars for some days."

Loma embraces Rama and asks. "What did you do?"

Her heart sings: "My Rama, my Rama"

"If she hadn't been Kukshi's wife, I would have killed her. While such women live, how can Dharma flourish?"

Loma is silent.

"Loma"—

"Yes, Rama?"

"I saw a thing today that I had never seen before—clear as light."

"What was it?" again her heart beats fast

"You are my wife, as Arundhati was Vasishtha's, as Lopamudra was Agastya's"

"What did you say?" asks Loma, mad with joy

"You rejected Brihadratha You rejected Arjuna. You must not reject me now"

Loma does not know whether to cry or to laugh Tears of joy come to her eyes and she embraces him

"My Rama! Shall I cry or laugh? Who says I want to reject you? Who told you I would say 'no' to you?"

Rama—so curious in his make-up—looks at her seriously "I now see that you are my wife," he says, and buries his head, with its lion's mane, between her breasts.

Loma is silent Rama passes his hand over her breasts, over her body, softly, gently as though she were made of porcelain

The woods awake to life Loma feels as though she were a living torch, but Rama's eyes, looking at her, with the silvery lustre of a thousand moons, laves her as

with divine sap. For a moment they stand still. Heart beats against heart and eyes swim into eyes. They are one—like two globules of mercury.

II

Under Rama's direction, the Yadavas grow in power and wealth. Life becomes more orderly and clean. Then the High-Priest, Kukshi, under orders from Mahishmati, starts a conspiracy to kill Bhadrashrenya with the assistance of the Sharyats, a neighbouring tribe, and to instal his younger son, Madhu, on the throne of the Yadavas.

Rama anticipates these moves. Before the day of the attack, he flings himself with his trained band on the settlement of the Sharyats. His orders are strict. No adult is to be spared; the women and cattle alone are to be brought back to the settlement of the Yadavas.

The Sharyats are destroyed; but their women and children, carts and cattle are brought to the Yadavas. No more are the two tribes at war with one another. No more are they to indulge in incessant quarrels and murders. There is now only one tribe, and Bhadrashrenya is its king.

The utter ruthlessness of this conquest reaches the ears of Mriga, Arjuna's mistress, who rules his empire in his absence at Mahishmati on the distant banks of the Narmada. She invites Rama, Loma and Bhadrashrenya to come and visit her. There is no refusing the invitation.

Rama asks Pratip to take the Yadavas to the territory of his father-in-law. He senses that if the Yadavas continued to live in Saurashtra, the wrath of Mriga would lead to their destruction.

III

The news of the coming of Richika's grandson, Rama of the Battle-axe, the High-Priest of the Haihaya tribe by

right, spreads like wildfire in Mahishmati and the people are filled with delight.

Rama is lodged with Mrikunda, the pseudo High-Priest, in the temple of Pashupati on the banks of the Narmada.

To him comes Mriga, mistress of Arjuna. She is curious to see the boy who has performed wonders, destroyed ancient tribes and made men love and fear him passionately. She sees eyes of flame, lips of silent strength, a face of godlike calm. She hears words of affectionate understanding which stir unfamiliar chords in her heart. Her overpowering sensuality is awakened by a smile which thrills her heart and fires her sinewy, perfect limbs. She is fascinated by Rama. She invites him to dinner. When he comes to her fearlessly, trusting her as a father would a daughter, leaving even his inseparable battle-axe at the door-step, a feeling unfamiliar to woman comes over her. He praises her statesmanship. He tells her of her dreams of wanting to extend Arjuna's empire from the Indus to Ceylon. He assures her that he wants the same thing, only he wants it to be supported by Dharma, the eternal law of the Gods. If she will trust him and join hands with him, he will help her to realise her imperial dreams and from the Indus to Ceylon will be heard the chant of the Rishis, singing the praise of the great Gods. And Arjuna should, he adds, honour the woman who has added to his glory in this way by making her his legitimate spouse.

Mriga, who had come to conquer, remains a willing slave. Her ambition is roused, and appears easy to realise—if only this man of far-seeing vision can be by her side. And she feels the injustice of it all. She has given her all to Arjuna, body and soul, conscience and statesmanship. For him she has slaved, poisoned and murdered,

planned and conspired And is she not worthy to be his wife ?

Anupadesha now worships this new Gurudeva. Men and women, from far-off places, come to him to get but a glimpse of his face, a touch of his feet, and his silent blessing.

In a few days Rama becomes the centre of formidable power and inspiration. And Loma, adored by her lord and adoring him, joins the feats of arms of the Bhrigus and becomes the Mother, the human link between the distant, dread God and the humble worshipper

But Mriga does not forgive Bhadrashrenya. Rama guesses her intentions and sends the man away to safety to Pratip, who is awaiting him on the banks of the Mahi with the Yadavas.

The Sharyata prince, Jyamagha, who alone has escaped the massacre on that fateful night when all Sharyata adults had been put to death, has vowed to kill Rama, and comes at night to kill him.

In the guise of an Aghori, Jyamagha comes crawling with knife in hand He is but a few cubits away. Behind the sacrificial fire, his victim is sitting, as if meditating

Suddenly two fearful eyes open. Streams of light issue from them. Seeing two jets of light, Jyamagha lies motionless.

“Is it Jyamagha?” comes a voice, soft as a caress. Jyamagha shudders “Jyamagha, have you come to avenge your father and your tribe? Come, kill me I will not stop you.” Jyamagha trembles “What will you gain by killing me? Why not come with me? We shall lead all these people from darkness into light. I did not kill your father for a selfish end, nor your tribesmen out

of malice. If you have no faith in me, come quickly and kill me."

"Jyamagha, I want to make the Arya Dharma free from fear—from the Indus to Ceylon. I want the Arya tribes to serve learning and strength. Come, come with me Your place is with me, come. And if you have no faith in me, come and kill me. Here is my chest"

The knife falls from Jyamagha's hands. The fearful eyes become melting, the voice, kindly, like a mother's caress. His threat is drowned in tears He somehow finds his legs and runs—runs for his life!

IV

Arjuna, victorious in his wars with Ravana, prepares to return to his country. On the way back, he hears what has taken place in his capital: of Rama's exploits in Saurashtra, of his arrival in Mahishmati; of his people's love for him; of his mighty influence over them. He is furious He comes back, determined to destroy this enemy who had escaped death at his hands more than once.

Arjuna of the Thousand Arms comes to Mahishmati and sees Gurudeva Rama, the man of fearless vision, who sees men and things as none before him had seen them. He meets Mriga. In admiring mood, she tells him of her dream to build an empire for him with Rama's aid and she demands marriage in place of concubinage as her reward for a life's service Arjuna flies into a brutish rage, and he strikes Mriga He orders the massacre of the Bhrigus; and directs that Rama be brought before him and done to death.

Mriga conveys Arjuna's intentions to Rama, but he is adamant; he will not flee. He sends Loma away with the Bhrigus He promises her that he will rejoin her

when the need arises. He is Arjuna's Guru, and none will dare to touch him.

Rama, tied with ropes, stands before Arjuna of the Thousand Arms, unmoved, with godlike calm. He tells the raging monarch: "Arjuna, be wise and control yourself. I have come to show you the path to greatness. You control your subjects by fear; I can make them loyal by love. You can fight; I can give you the strength of peace. You love darkness; I can give you the light of knowledge. Leave this power of barbaric might. I can give the power, which Dharma protects."

Arjuna lifts his hand to kill Rama. But Rama raises his voice prophetically.

"I came to save you, you have refused my offer. Go down to perdition—where even the vilest of mortals dare not go."

Fear seizes Arjuna's heart. The sword falls from his soldierly hands. His new commander stands, as once Bhadrashrenya had stood, to stop him from touching Rama.

Rama stands firm, his eyes blazing with fire. Arjuna feels uncertain of himself and desists from killing Rama.

Rama is then put in a cell, to which Mriga and Arjuna's new commander come and beg him to go away. Within sight of Arjuna and his generals, Rama leaves the palace.

V

Secretly, Mriga sends away Rama in a boat to Chandratirtha. When the boat reaches Chandratirtha, one of the boatmen bores a hole in the bottom of their craft and it sinks. Rama recognises the man who scuttles the boat. He is Jyamagha, the last survivor of the Sharyata tribe he had destroyed. On the southern bank of the Rewa, in an inaccessible forest, opposite Chandratirtha, are the dread

Aghoris, who live on raw flesh and the marrow of the brain and who on dark nights gather where men are cremated.

Rama plunges into the river and begins to swim towards the Aghori forest, with Jyamagha in pursuit, trying to kill him. Rama reaches the bank first; Jyamagha as he comes to the bank sees a crocodile with mouth wide open dashing after him. Rama flings his battle-axe at the jaws of the monster, which disappears in the waters, reddening the stream with its blood. Jyamagha, who has come to kill Rama, is saved by him. However, before he can thank his protector, ghoulish screams resound in the forest. Aghoris, with weapons made of animal ribs, sweep down upon them and capture them.

Finding that there is no trace of Rama, Loma comes disguised as a boy to Mrikunda, accompanied by Vimad, Vriddha's son and Rama's loyal tutor. She is trying to find out what has happened to Rama. She contacts Mriga, who tells her of the boat having been sunk and of Rama having been seen to land on the bank upon which no human being can set foot and remain alive.

Loma, however, has faith in the powers of her lord; it is not easy to kill him. So she decides to get into touch with the chief of the Aghoris. This chief is the dread Daddanatha, whom people had heard of, but never seen. He could, said the reports, fly in the air and walk on the waters. His fondness for human blood was attested to by the presence of a corpse, whose head had been severed by claws, and whose veins had been sucked dry.

Living in hiding in a lonely house in Mahishmati, Loma makes friends with those who claim to know the fearful rites of the Aghoris and masters them. With Rama's name on her lips and his living presence before

her eyes, she performs those horrifying rituals at midnight in places where dead bodies are cremated.

She now learns that Guru Daddanatha comes only once a month, in the late hours of a dark night, to the cremation ground near Pashupati's temple. Then he makes an offering of the skull of a freshly-killed human being. On the appropriate day, therefore, Loma makes the ritualistic signs and places an offering in that cremation ground and climbs a tree to watch the coming of Daddanatha, whom none has seen before. Soon after midnight, she hears the lapping of waves and then sees a giant cat coming out of the river and running up the bank. The huge creature, which has a mane like a lion's, kills a man with its claws, sucks his blood and, standing on two legs, offers the skull to Pashupati.

Loma finds it difficult to get into touch with this fearful Daddanatha. No one will accompany her when she seeks his hiding place. She finally induces two or three staunch warriors to come with her but they faint at the sight of the jungle creature. And she herself nearly faints when she sees Daddanatha feeding a pet crocodile and slipping away swiftly, pausing a moment amid the waves of the Narmada.

But now hope burns bright in her. Fishermen bring her tales of a tall white man having been seen moving among the Aghoris on the south bank of the river at Chandratirtha. With the connivance of one of Rama's devoted disciples, she conveys the news to Arjuna that Rama has been accepted as their Guru by the Aghoris. As a consequence, the angry emperor starts harassing the Aghoris in his city. Daddanatha retaliates. First a soldier is killed; then the son of Arjuna's commander; both by the characteristic method of the Guru, the head being severed from the body by claws, and the veins sucked

dry. After this, mysterious signs of Aghori rituals are found night after night in Arjuna's palace. They are found in the mornings, drawn even in front of the emperor's bed. Then one day, his favourite little image of God Pashupati disappears from under his pillow, and Arjuna's nerves are shattered. Terrified by the traces of the invisible foe, whom he can never meet, he loses courage, behaves brutally by day and shivers with fright by night.

Mriga comes to know that Loma had propitiated Daddanatha and is working through him for Arjuna's destruction. She begs of Loma to desist from her intention and to save Arjuna. Truce is made between Daddanatha and Arjuna, who stops molesting the Aghoris, and the reprisals cease.

But Arjuna feels mortified that he, the world conqueror, has been terrorised by an Aghori chief. The truce is no truce for him. He wants to avenge himself on Daddanatha and plans to kill him when he comes to the temple of Pashupati on the next dark night to make his monthly offering of a human skull.

Loma has now propitiated Daddanatha, and on this very night she asks him whether a stranger came to the Aghori forest a year and half ago. Highly pleased, Daddanatha tells her of the arrival of Bhargava Nath whom he has adopted as a son. Loma tells him that Bhargava is her husband and that she wants to be taken to him. Daddanatha promises to take her to the Aghori forest when next he comes.

Arjuna who has in the meantime concealed himself behind a rock rushes upon Daddanatha, his mace upraised. Loma wounds him in the arm with her discus. Arjuna makes a rush at her. Daddanatha howls, makes wild noises and goes down on all fours. The swords of

Arjuna and Loma clash, and Loma's weapon drops from her hand. Daddanatha jumps on to the back of Arjuna and his long sharp nails seek the throat of his victim. Arjuna exerts every muscle of his strong body to shake off the Aghori. The shrill cries of Daddanatha ring in his ears. Arjuna falls to the ground. Daddanatha's long nails had almost pierced his throat when Loma cries "Daddanatha, Master, do not kill him. I have promised his queen that I will not let him be killed."

Daddanatha hits Arjuna into unconsciousness. Now, Loma, who has been wounded, faints. Daddanatha sees her falling. He comes running back to her and lifts her up.

Arjuna of the Thousand Arms recovers. He gets up, takes his sword from the ground, and rushes towards Daddanatha, who is standing in the river with Loma in his arms.

But he sees Daddanatha flying into the air; and the sword falls from his grip. Then Daddanatha is seen rushing away, standing on the waters of the Narmada, with Loma in his arms. Arjuna loses his senses, and falls.

VI

In the land of the Aghoris, Rama's fearless behaviour evokes admiration, and he is allowed to live on the promise that he would not leave the forest without Daddanatha's permission. With concentrated purpose, he turns to improving the lot of these filthy but curiously simple-hearted and honest people. He teaches them the art of the *Atharvan* Rishis for the cure of ailments. He also instils into them a sense of cleanliness and order. Daddanatha grows fond of him, adopts him as a son and teaches him the Aghori arts in which he is skilled. But one thing Rama will not do. He will not feed the crocodiles,

make friends with them and ride them in the river as Daddanatha is accustomed to do.

Marriage among the Aghoris was a transient affair, but Rama declines to accept this notion. He has a wife, who is his very self and, to the amazement of the Aghoris, he declines to marry the highest born maiden in that forest.

One day, however, to the surprise of the Aghoris, Dadanatha comes as usual on a fast-moving crocodile, but with a girl in his arms. He hands her over to Rama, and thus is Loma united to her lord.

Rama and Loma leave the land of the Aghoris with Daddanatha's blessings. Arjuna has now decreed the death of every Yadava and Bhrigu and has gathered together a large army to pursue Bhadrashrenya and the Yadavas who are waiting in the forests on the river Mahi. Rama decides to join them and lead them across the tractless forests and deserts of what is now known as Rajputana, to the safety of Aryavarta.

On the way he stops at Mahishmati, where Mriga meets him on the outskirts of the city in a small house which she maintains as a private retreat.

Mriga is now a tired woman. Rama's contact has given her a sense of nobility and purity. She is dissatisfied with her usual life. Arjuna is getting more unsteady, more brutal, more reckless every day and Mriga wants a last meeting with her saviour. Rama invites her to come with him to Aryavarta, but the proud Mriga declines. Sadly she shakes her head and says:

"Gurudeva, I cannot leave him (Arjuna). Wicked, ungrateful, cruel as he is, he is still woven into my life. I have never known parents. Far back as my memories go, I have been the tool of men's lust. Old men, middle-aged men, young men, even boys have consumed themselves, like butterflies, in the fire that is me. But I am

not a harlot. Where I give, I give all. I may be stifled myself, but, like a creeper, I cling closely; I do not live to get away."

Rama, the Bhrigu, looks at her affectionately. She continues.

"I have given everything to Arjuna of the Thousand Arms since he was fifteen. I have given him my youth, my fire, my strength. For him, I have practised statecraft and either killed his enemies or caused them to be killed. He has often thrashed me. Twice he tried to poison me. It would have been easy to have killed him, it is so even today. But his irresponsible temper, his brutal, cruel look, his every muscle are a part of my life. Without him, I am like one dead. I have been the mistress of many, but only for momentary pleasure. Now to be his mistress is everything to me. How can I leave him?"

Rama invites her to come to his father's ashram.

"No, no, no," she cries, "I will not come. I have no strength left. To come with you requires youth and ideals. Lord, forgive me. When I lose myself in a world of fancy, I see you as my lover. But, oh my God, I have no courage left."

When Rama presses her to come, she frankly confesses:

"Tempt me not. My God, I am not a fool. I am lost in love, but I am not blind. Once I had hoped to see fresh and resplendant dreams in your company, to make even you see things which you had never seen before. I wanted to melt your stony detachment by my flaming passion. But you are pure as the rising Sun. I am filth; I emit stench..

"I am still beautiful. My throat, my limbs are still shapely. My attraction is still undimmed. But stormy sensuality has made me lifeless. You have been pleased to look upon me as an elder sister. But I know I cannot

be an elder sister I shall grow old. I can manage your ashram, bring up your children, and serve the Bhrigus But, my God," she continued with tears in her eyes, "I am not meant for such stale dignity If I can never be the queen of a god-like man such as you, there is no place in your world for me and there is no place in my life for illusions Here I grew, and here I must wither."

She asks but one boon. that when she dies she should go to the world of Rama's ancestors which he will join in due course.

Rama sees that this woman, once a wanton, has been saved. Before the sacred fire and by means of the magic rituals of his ancestors, he adopts her as a daughter of the proud Bhrigu warrior-priests and enjoins upon her their privilege 'Death to those who follow *Adharma*.'

Here Mriga bids goodbye to Rama and faces Arjuna at night Fascinated by her beauty, he comes to her as usual She repulses him "I am a daughter of the Bhrigus," she cries, "adopted by Rāma of the Battle-Axe" Arjuna tries to seize her. With the name of Rama upon her lips, she kills herself.

VII

Across untrodden forests and blazing deserts, Rama leads the fleeing Yadavas and Bhrigus to distant Aryavarta They brave the dangers of virgin forests, impassable swamps, inclement weather, lack of food and water, the ferocity of wild beasts and, more remorseless than all, the pursuing fury of Arjuna's blood-thirsty tribes. Through these trials, Rama alone stands unruffled He maintains the morale of men, women and children, who love him more than their life He inspires with new confidence those whose hearts are faint and cheers the dying

moments of those who fall by the wayside. With 'Jaya-Gurudev' on their lips, they die, smiling blissfully.

At last they reach the bank of the river Sarasvati. But ere they can cross it, the pursuers catch up with them. Horses and men of both sides rush to allay their thirst in the river and fall on each other, mingling their blood with the sacred waters of Sarasvati, the mother of learning. At last Rama and a few hundred of the numerous tribesmen who had set out with him cross the river and reach Aryavarta.

But terrible news awaits Rama in the land of his dreams. The bloody war between Sudasa and Vasishtha on the one side, and, Vishvamitra and the ten kings (styled in the *Rig Veda* as the Battle of the Ten Kings) on the other, has passed into a bloodier phase. Many Bhrigus, including two of his brothers, have lost their lives in this long drawn-out tussle. But a worse piece of news awaits him. His mother, Renuka, the noblest of women, has dared what no Bhrigu woman had dared before: she has gone away to live with the prince of Gandharvas. His father, Jamadagni, has lost his mind and the Bhrigus, proudest of warrior-priests, have lost their morale.

Rama goes to his ancestral settlement, Bhrugugraam, and finds it deserted. He rushes to his father who, to him, was a mighty man among the great. But Jamadagni's mind has collapsed. He is oppressed with the idea that he has betrayed the mission of his life. His wife, Renuka, mother of the Bhrigus, has left him to live with the Gandharvas. His sons have failed him and his ancestors by refusing to give swift punishment to that erring woman.

With dazed eyes, Jamadagni talks incoherently to Rama, doubting even his son's paternity. Rama is stung to the quick. The law of the Bhrigus is stern. The erring wife must die. The father's word is law. He himself

has enforced it against other women. Now it is the turn of his mother, his beloved mother, whose pet child he is. And his father's mandate is clear.

His face grows stern; his eyes are two pin-points of fire. And as he came, so does he leave on his black horse, his battle-axe his only companion to vindicate the irrevocable law of the Bhrigus, the warrior-priests. He speeds to the distant mountains where the Gandharvas live. He meets his mother, whom he loves so well, but to whom he, the embodiment of Dharma, the law, must dispense swift justice.

"Why have you concealed yourself here?" demands the son.

Renuka replies: "The Lord of the Bhrigus is great. He is the master of learning and of strength. I have violated my Dharma, I know. But he does not care to know why I did it. You are my beloved child, and you also do not care to hear me. I have no fear of death. Since I first violated the law by disobeying my husband, I am dead to myself. I am waiting for the God of death. But he came here for hundreds, not for me. You have come in his awful shape. Come, darling, kill me. Save me from a sin which I have myself invited."

She offers her neck. Rama raises his battle-axe. Before he kills her, however, he asks one question:

"What was the Dharma which tempted you—Mother, thou goddess of mercy?"

To explain her conduct, Renuka takes him to see the Gandharvas, up on the mountain top. She takes him through a gorge to a broken down village. As they pass through it, lepers of both sexes and of all ages cry out to Renuka "Mother, Mother". Renuka then takes her son to the Prince of the Gandharvas for whom she has left her lord and her people.

There Rama sees the Prince of the Gandharvas, a leper in the last stages of dissolution, welcoming the Goddess of mercy with inarticulate noises.

"King of Gandharvas," Renuka says, "My son has come to meet me I have brought him to see you" Rama now sees why his mother has served these wretched beings in preference to being the mother of the Bhrigus, the mighty warrior-priests. His heart is full He flings his battle-axe away, covers his eyes with his hands and cries:

"Mother, Goddess of mercy. Forgive me, forgive me."

When they return, she says "Son, now you understand why I am waiting for death. Nothing but my death can remove the stigma on the Bhrigus and secure the triumph of Aryan greatness. If I have lived, it is because there is none to kill me When these thirty persons die, I will enter the fire in any case But now you must do your duty"

Renuka casts an affectionate glance at her son's battle-axe.

"Mother, we will talk about it in the morning," says Rama quietly

At night, Rama offers the choice to the Gandharvas. either they should allow him to kill them or he would kill his mother. The Gandharvas love the 'Mother' and prefer to die.

The next morning she finds Rama coolly washing his battle-axe in a stream She wants him to kill her

Rama invites her to come with him

"No I will not come No one will listen to you. And infamy will poison your youthful life You do not know our people"

Renuka speaks thus and pauses awe-struck

Rama's attitude changes It is no longer her affectionate son who speaks but a child of the mighty Everest,

distant, changeless, eternal, with strength at once irresistible and measureless. His voice changes as he says.

"I shall declare the law, and the world will have to listen. It will have no other choice."

Renuka stands frightened.

"Come, Mother. I give the order."

"No", Renuka says with firmness, "what about my Gandharvas?"

"I have thought about them already. Not one of them is alive. I have cut off the head of every one of them as they wanted that I should do." The mother is angry with the brutal son.

"Mother, Goddess of mercy," says Rama in an inspiring voice, "your tears are intended to strengthen the strong, not to lengthen the last moments of the dying"

Whereupon he lifts his angry mother in his arms and carries her away on his horse.

VIII

Mother and son make their way through mountain passes. On the way back home they join a party of trading Panis, and as they proceed further, news reaches them of a great battle fought in the vicinity. King Bheda and Rama's elder brother have been killed in fighting; and Vishvamitra, the great prophet, is not to be found.

King Sudasa has won the final round. Bheda's wife, for whom this endless war had been fought, has been recaptured. Vasishtha, the great sage, has vindicated the mission of his life. Aryavarta has been purged of a great sin.

Rama who saves the party of the Panis from molestation by the fleeing soldiers presses it into his service and induces it to go to the battlefield. In the dead of night, he collects the dead bodies of the mighty who have fallen,

and rescues others, including Vasishtha's grandson, the Sage Parashara

Rama then meets Vasishtha, the great apostle of Aryan culture, and thus the future meets the past.

Rama and Vasishtha then perform the last rites of the dead heroes and join Renuka who is nursing the wounded

Vishvamitra's body is not found, and Vasishtha, now that his mission is performed, seeks his life-long enemy and rival in learning and self-discipline. In his heart, there is no malice. He has carried out the will of the Gods as had Vishvamitra too, according to the light the Gods had given to each of them.

Riksha, the uncouth friend of Vishvamitra, had been for years the High-Priest of the dark, Aryanised tribesmen of Bheda. He hated all strife; to him the highest end of life was to live happily. But war had come to his doors and he had seen his beloved friend Vishvamitra overwhelmed in battle.

Riksha, the High-Priest of Bheda, forgets his years and his heavy body. He rushes to the battle-field and rescues the wounded Vishvamitra. In the confusion of the fight and in the oncoming dusk he carries his friend outside the arena of battle though he himself is pierced by flying arrows.

Staggering under the weight of his dying friend, he takes the road to his own ashram. He forgets everything except that his friend whom he has loved since their school-days in Agastya's ashram, has to be carried to his own place. He stops, he falls, he rises again, and lifts the beloved burden. Blinded by his own and Vishvamitra's blood, he struggles on.

Riksha makes an effort, but he cannot lift Vishvamitra. He tries again. He succeeds a little but the body

drops from his hands. He tries again, and there is the taste of salt in his mouth. He vomits, he feels that it is blood that he is throwing out. But he has to take Vishvamitra, his beloved friend, to his ashram. He lifts Vishvamitra again with all his ebbing strength. Yes, Vishvamitra is his beloved friend, his life itself. He used to carry him on his shoulders.

Riksha goes forward; suddenly he feels that Vishvamitra is falling. And the mind of Riksha, the sage, is filled with darkness.

Then Rama finds the spot where Vishvamitra lies prone. He is on his deathbed and knows that when Orion rises on the horizon he will pass away. He tells Rama:

"My royal line is extinguished. Devadatta is gone, his brothers are dead, poor miserable Rohini is no more. But this is the day of my triumph.

"Self-restraint and strength are great, but greater than either is the heroism of self-surrender. The Gods have given me the opportunity to acquire that heroism I have not been vanquished. On this cracking Aryavarta, I have planted the banner of Unity. My death will be its crowning glory. My victory is in my death. All the tribes are now one, by blood and by culture."

Then Vasishtha comes to meet his life-long rival.

Vasishtha who has just won the great war blesses the younger Vishvamitra and begs forgiveness for having interrupted his life's work.

Vishvamitra answers. "Great ascetic, you have put no obstacle in my way. I am what I am because of you. If there had been no Vasishtha, I would have remained Vishvaratha. To emulate you I acquired learning and self-discipline. As you were a High-Priest, I left a throne to become a High-Priest. You were a master of *mantras*; in emulation I became a master of the sacrificial lore. You

saw the distinction of races; to extract the poison from your creed I accepted the challenge of this great war You are the sky-kissing mountain. I only grew strong in climbing the peaks of your exploits ”

“Best of Rishis,” Vasishtha replies, “the Gods have given us both power to see, but we have seen different truths. Who knows what secret is hidden in this divergence? If I had not resisted your truth, where should I have been? But I am sad, I am so much older than you. I should have gone to the land of our ancestors instead of you ”

Vishvamitra replies: “Mighty ascetic, I am not sorry. I have accomplished my life-work The Gods have given me success such as never dreamt of Best of ascetics, God Surya has left no wish of mine unfulfilled. By his grace, I removed the difference between Arya and Dasyu, made an Arya of Shambara’s daughter, made Aryahood accessible to all men I made the lore of Vishvamitra as profound as that of Vasishtha My son, Shunashepa, is heir to my learning, developing it to greater depth. Wherever the *Gayatri* is uttered, there the spirit of Vishvamitra will be ”

And thus speaking on his life-work, the noble Vishvamitra grew incoherent

“Come,” he uttered, gasping for breath, “I take you to the resplendant path leading to Godhood—beyond anger and malice Let no one weep over his weakness God Varuna has opened the portals of heaven Come higher still higher ” And the voice grew faint

His breath grew short and he muttered “Jamadagni, Orion has risen ” He then threw back his head Rama caught the falling body in his arms, and tears fell from the eyes of Vasishtha, the best of sages

Having performed the funeral rites of the mighty

dead, Rama proceeds to keep his plighted word to his father and his ancestors. He takes his mother to be killed at the very feet of his father

Rama comes on his thundering horse, his mother in his arms Every one is aghast at what is happening. Rama, the great Master, whose deeds have caught the imagination of all Aryavarta, seeks to kill his mother at his father's command and then put an end to himself for killing his mother

He goes to his father Jamadagni, chief of the warrior priests of the Bhrigus, whose mind has but one fixed idea, to see Renuka, his wife, killed. Rama places Renuka at his father's feet, who commands that her head be severed

"Yes, father" says Rama, and adds "Mother, Mother, Goddess of mercy, I obey my father's mandate." And in his voice is sweetness and measureless love.

"Son", says she, "here is my neck I have always prayed for death at your hands, my loved one"

"Rama", says Jamadagni, "Among us, the elected wife of the head of a tribe has never been known to have lived with another man. No one has even heard of such a thing But this I have seen in my own family, in my own house I must now once and for all uphold the law and maintain the purity of Arya life Many a time have I severed the heads of faithless wives, now it is my turn to perform my—my last duty "

Rama's face is red with anger "Father, I shall also perform my duty as a son—for the last time."

Jamadagni shows surprise But Rama continues, "I shall kill my mother I shall accept the mandate of my father But I refuse to join the land of my forefathers I shall go with my mother I cannot save Arya greatness

by disobeying my father or by killing my mother. And even if I could, I do not want to live."

And then, the mighty Rama, usually silent, upbraids his father.

"You have never heard truth spoken. I have eyes. You have none If you had, you would not have thought that Amba, serving the dying lepers, was living in adultery You were blind. You could not see that sin is not in the act, but in the intention."

Renuka, though crying, intervenes. "Keep silent, Rama You are talking disrespectfully."

"Why should I remain silent? (turning to Jamadagni) In the false pride of Aryan greatness, you have destroyed Aryan ideals. You are still destroying them."

Renuka is furious. She slaps Rama, as if he is a child.

"Son, you insult your father. Fall at his feet. Ask for his forgiveness."

Rama stands silent proud as a lion, looking with concentrated wrath at his father.

"Rama, leave your pride," says Renuka, and in his mother's voice, Rama hears the tidal motion of irresistible love Curtains are lifted from his eyes "Son, it is my command—the last one Cut off my head "

Rama falls at his father's feet, angrily, involuntarily Renuka understands him She places her hand lovingly on his back

"Not in this proud way You are the protector of Dharma The head of the son must always be at the feet of the father."

Rama yields and apologises to his father Jamadagni's mind clears up The sight of his long lost wife and the shock of his son's trenchent condemnation had

made him realise the situation. When Rama lifts his battle-axe, Jamadagni cries :

"Renuka, Renuka, I had killed you in my mind. Your son has resuscitated you. Rama, throw the battle-axe away. I withdraw my command."

He lifts her as she falls at his feet, and tears are in all their eyes.

Sudasa is now the emperor of Aryavarta, Vasishtha, its father and spiritual guide, and a great festival of victory is held.

In the meantime, Loma rescues the widow of Bheda from the palace of Sudasa, where she had been kept pending her purification and re-acceptance by her former husband. And Rama establishes her infant son in a principality which his pupils had carved out of the forests to the south of Aryavarta.

Rama rejects the offer of Vasishtha that he should succeed him in the office of High-Priest to Sudasa.

He then organises his Bhrigus as the warrior-priests pledged to protect the ashrams, the homes of learning, to curb the vagaries of rulers, and to render the highways safe.

But, meanwhile, Arjuna has learnt of the escape of Rama and makes a gigantic effort to invade Aryavarta and to destroy him and all the Aryan tribes. He collects a large force and marches on Aryavarta leaving behind a trail of misery, of burning villages, dying men and raped women.

Incidentally, Parashara, the grandson of Vasishtha, who has come to hate violence, appeals to the kings not to resist the irresistible Arjuna by force, but his voice is that of one crying in the wilderness.

Rama instructs his followers to withdraw to the north in order to concentrate their forces, so that Arjuna, when

he reaches Aryavarta, finds the settlement deserted. Arjuna proceeds to the ashram of Vasishtha. He has a grudge against this venerable sage, who once had the temerity to lay down the law for him. He finds the ashram deserted but for the sage who has refused to depart and single-handed, relying on his spiritual strength, decided to face the great destroyer.

"Vasishtha, sage," shouts Arjuna insolently. The sage goes on making offerings to the sacrificial fire. None of the six old men about him look up.

"Stop, don't you know me?" Arjuna roars. Vasishtha gives the offerings and looks at him. "I have known you from childhood," he answers coolly.

"Not that way, man. But I have come as the destroyer of Aryavarta," adds Arjuna.

The sage does not reply "You once tried to teach me the ways of Aryavarta. Now you will have to live according to my way," shouts Arjuna.

"Vasishtha lives but in one way—the way the Gods will," the sage replies.

"Ha, Ha!" laughs Arjuna. "It is the will of the Gods that you should live as I will. I have come to reduce Aryavarta to ashes."

"Son of Kritavirya," replies the sage, "you were always shallow. Anyone can rob, destroy or turn things to ashes."

"You will know it when all you possess is reduced to ashes," Arjuna retorts.

"What we have planted with the grace of the Gods, you cannot destroy. The more you burn, the more will it sprout," Vasishtha answers.

"Do not boast, Vasishtha. Get up and tell your disciples to give us food," orders Arjuna.

"No wicked destroyer is offered hospitality in Vasishtha's ashram," replies the sage curtly.

Arjuna rushes towards Vasishtha to pull him by the beard. Vasishtha, serene and calm, closes his eyes, and, before Arjuna can touch him, falls down dead. Arjuna is taken aback and orders the ashram to be burnt down.

Thence he proceeds to the ashram of Bhrigu, which Jamadagni and Renuka have refused to leave. The laws of the Aryans enjoin that an ashram is sacred.

Arjuna has more than one grievance against the saintly Jamadagni. His father had cursed his tribe, and now he wants the son to lift the curse under threats, and become his High-Priest.

Arjuna takes possession of the ashram and makes it his headquarters. He ties Jamadagni to a tree and everyday he comes to him, calls upon him to lift the curse and when the sage declines wounds him with an arrow. It is death by slow torture. Renuka, in tears, stands day and night by her husband, giving him water and nursing his wounds. Everyday she prays to the Gods to send Rama. Once she asks Jamadagni.

"How long can you suffer this torture?"

"This is not torture. This is a struggle between a brute and an Arya and Aryan strength will conquer."

"What will happen to you?"

"Arjuna will never get me to do what he wants. He will die, his wish unfulfilled."

Arjuna, whenever he can, demands a blessing from the sage, and is invariably denied the privilege.

Then news comes that Rama is arriving. From three directions rush the invading armies. The centre is formed by the cavalry, led by Rama, on a black charger, with

his mighty battle-axe. A mysterious halo surrounds him, and the armies of Arjuna, seeing it, are afraid.

A battle ensues in which the Haihayas are beaten. And, finally, the two mortal enemies join in single combat.

Rama vanquishes Arjuna and Arjuna is captured. But even in defeat, he is wily. He slips from his captors, picks up two arrows and shoots one at the dying Jamadagni tied to a tree and the other at Rama.

Rama sees the arrow coming. With a growl which none had heard issuing from him before, he leaps into the air, and comes down upon Arjuna. Arjuna's head is severed from his body and rolls on the ground.

Thus ends the story of the youth of Parashurama, Rama of the Battle-Axe, the sixth incarnation of Vishnu. Rama, the son of Dasharatha, was the seventh, and Shri Krishna was the eighth. His mythic figure dominates the background of the *Mahabharata*.

The portrait, now sombre, now bland, reveals this legendary figure as godlike, above mortal weaknesses, moving as a symbol of tremendous strength based on justice.

Tarpana

There is one play *Tarpana* (The Obsequial Offering) which, though written very early, serves as a fitting epilogue to this epic story which occupied Munshi's attention, with intervals for well-nigh twenty-five years. The first piece in the series, *Purandara Parajaya* was done in 1923. The last, *Bhagawan Parashurama*, was published in 1946.

Aged Rama, still worshipped as 'Divinity,' has settled down in Shurparaka. The Haihayas, under the sons and grandsons of Arjuna, have again invaded Aryavarta,

destroyed hermitages and all but exterminated the Bhrigus.

One Bhrigu woman, has, however, saved her last remaining son by concealing him in her thigh (*uru*), and so he comes to be called Aurva. He dedicates his life to resurrecting Aryavarta, studies the learning of the Aryas and collects a band of devoted disciples. He then retreats into the mountains and raises an army of disciples pledged to rescue Aryavarta from the Haihayas. He also rescues the last vestige of Aryan Royalty, the infant scion of the royal line, Sagara by name, and brings him up.

But the fates are weaving destinies differently. Aurva has decided that the boat which carries the Haihaya king's only daughter, Suvarna, on a pleasure trip, is to be sunk. When the boat sinks, Sagara rescues her, not knowing that Aurva has willed otherwise. He then falls in love with her.

Sagara does not know the plans of his master and meets Suvarna in the palace of Vitahavya, the Haihaya king, every night by swimming the river.

At last the great day comes. Aurva crowns Sagara as the king of Aryavarta at a great festival in his mountain fortress. And, to complete his prowess, he prays to Lord Rama of the Battle-Axe to send him his mighty weapon. The prayer is granted, the weapon comes by air. After installing Sagara, Aurva tells him the story of the mission of his life and unfolds the purpose to which Sagara is dedicated.

An hour later, Sagara is seen walking outside on a natural fortress of crags. His eyes are listless; his lips compressed in hopelessness, his forehead creased. He looks idly at a hole in the crags, and says to himself:

"Why did grandfather ask me to see him here? (looking at the hole) No He is not come God, give me strength, give me vision What shall I do? Whom shall

I ask? Where shall I go? How dare I disobey my grandfather? And if I do not disobey him, what shall I do? (looks down).

“For months I and Suvarna have nursed hopes of seeing peace between grandfather and Vitahavya, but now they are all gone. How will grandfather, planning terrible destruction, make peace? How will the king of the Haihayas accept the mandate of Aurva and give me his daughter?

“Shall I disobey grandfather’s mandate? If I do, his life’s mission will be frustrated and the Aryavarta of my dreams will never be seen.

“And Suvarna, she spends every moment in thinking of me! What will happen to her? If I kill her father, Vitahavya, what will happen to her? Her heart, tender as a blossom, will be burnt to ashes. Suvarna, so devoted to her father, how will she regard his murderer?

“And how shall I live without Suvarna?

“What shall I do with a throne without her? What if Aryavarta comes into existence and she is not there! Oh, God of death, come and save me from this difficulty!”

Then Aurva comes and asks for the Guru’s fee. With a trembling heart, Sagara folds his hands in humility and says:

“Grandfather, what can I give you? Whatever is mine, is yours”

AURVA (seriously) Get me what is not yours.

SAGARA Command me I shall obey

AURVA Is it a promise?

SAGARA (almost fainting): Yes

AURVA Then, bring me tomorrow at sunrise—

SAGARA (frightened): What?

AURVA Two heads, one of Vitahavya—and—of Suvarna, Vitahavya’s daughter.

SAGARA (with folded hands): Forgive me, grandfather. Have mercy, you are frightening. Your mission is destruction. Cruelty is easy for you. But the Aryavarta of your dreams—the holy land of the Aryas, peaceful and happy—sanctified by sacrifice and mantras—will it ever arise again from such destruction?

AURVA. Has anything remained pure after the touch of the Haihayas? At their touch, the cows have become fetid beef; the Brahmans but beasts. The peace of Aryavarta will only spring from Haihaya's blood.

Sagara begs for Suvarna's life.

AURVA: Shall the son of that woman be the Emperor of Aryavarta?

Then Aurva tells Sagara of what the Haihayas had done to Aryavarta.

"The ashrams were flying dust Vultures flew over the skeletons of sacred cows. Sarasvati and Drishadvati—the streams of purity—emitted the stench of rotting corpses My father and other Bhrigus fought till they died And then the grandfather of your Suvarna pursued women.. Those who climbed trees were hunted down with arrows, those who fell into the rivers were pursued and dishonoured, those who escaped into the mountains were caught and raped; their wombs were ripped open, and they were left to die

"My mother concealed me in her thigh—for ten years Then she hid herself in Gautam's house and brought me up.

"The Haihayas built their empire on the dust of Aryavarta I vowed to resurrect it, single-handed. Slowly I rescued the looted wealth of the Aryas I wandered over the land for years For years, I sat at the feet of Parashurama, the mighty son of Jamadagni, venerable in ancient dignity At last, I came to this mountain fortress I made all of you my disciples; in your hearts I laid

the foundations of Aryavarta. I gave into your hands the instruments of the Haihayas' destruction. And, for years now, the might of the Haihayas, which overspread the land from sea to sea, has trembled at my name... . And, tomorrow, at sunrise, I shall see my resolve fulfilled—I shall make obsequial offerings to my ancestors, doomed to premature death, with the blood of the last Haihaya."

Sagara hesitates and breaks down. But the inexorable Aurva insists on his pupil carrying out his mandate. Aurva demands of Sagara that he, as the pupil, must repay the debt to the master by killing the last Haihaya, thus enabling Aurva to offer the obsequial offerings to his dead ancestors with Vitahavya's blood.

Vitahavya, the Haihaya king, invites the king of Saurashtra, of the Haihaya branch, to marry Suvarna to him. While the festivities are going on, the distant mountain top rumbles and blood red flames issue from it—sure signs that Aurva is angry. The thoughtless king of Saurashtra rushes into the forest boasting that he will kill Aurva. He is engulfed in darkness and is destroyed by Aurva's might.

Suvarna, however, is very happy and hopes that Sagara will bring about peace between Aurva and her father and she could then marry him. She goes to the terrace of the palace and waits for Sagara who is expected there.

The last scene of the drama may, with certain omissions, be reproduced.

The lovers meet Suvarna finds Sagara highly nervous.

SUVARNA (smiling). Now you have melted. Have you done something? Have you had a talk with your grandfather?

SAGARA (startled). Grandfather?

SUVARNA (angrily) : Have you forgotten ? What about peace ?

SAGARA (inattentively) : Yes, peace !

SUVARNA : Did you talk to him about it ?

SAGARA (looking to all sides with fright) : Yes.

SUVARNA (impatiently) : What did grandfather say ? Speak—

SAGARA (harshly) : Grandfather is coming here to-morrow morning.

SUVARNA (startled) : Grandfather ! Here ! (laughing) Yes, yes, I see—to make peace. Well done, Sagara (she embraces him) You have worked wonders even with grandfather.

SAGARA (bitterly) : Yes, yes, I have worked wonders.

SUVARNA : As you have worked wonders with me.

SAGARA (smiling bitterly again) : Yes, yes, in the same way.

SUVARNA : Then there will be peace tomorrow.

SAGARA : Tomorrow, when the sun rises (looks into the darkness with frightened eyes).

They cling to each other and try to sleep

SAGARA : When will it be ? When will the dawn come ? I feel as if someone is coming.

SUVARNA : No, no. It is only midnight.

SAGARA (speaking in a piteous voice) Then come to me, my love Time once gone never returns (draws her to him) Come nearer. This night is perfect in its beauty. How do we know what the dawn will bring ?

SUVARNA (coming nearer) . Yes, yes, Sagara

SAGARA (kissing her) . Love ! Today let us both be one.

SUVARNA (clinging to him) : Yes, Lord

SAGARA This moment, once gone, will never return.

What do we care for the future? (kissing her) Only this moment, my love.

After some hours the scene darkens. Suvarna is seen sleeping with her head on the lap of Sagara.

SAGARA (to himself): Your night of perfect beauty is fast disappearing, Suvarna. Now you are glimpsing a life of heavenly delight You will have it. A few hours, a few moments and the portals of your heaven—yours and mine—will be closed for ever?

SAGARA (to himself): Shall I refuse the commandments? What about the prayers of this beloved? Revenge for my father's death? Then, do I not owe something to love? If I have to create Aryavarta, have I not to seek the companionship which alone will make life worth living? Why, Oh! Why? If Guru, and father, and Aryavarta, all have a claim on me, why is it that Suvarna and I alone do not matter, Oh! God! (weeps).

Suvarna suddenly wakes up and tells Sagara that she had had a dream, that both of them will go away in a boat, far far away She then goes to sleep again

SAGARA She wants to go away, far far away, but with me Is there no place on earth, unblighted by the revenge which animates Vitahavya and Aurva? Is there no place untouched by misery and fear at the end of the world on some mountain top in some solitary spot? Suvarna and I—fearlessness and peace; the sun and the moon, our only companions Can we not find such a place (half asleep) where no ancestors can ever make any demands on us? Where the future will not frighten us, where the commands will come only from the heart, where our anxiety will only be inspired by love, where our only ambition will be to make each other happy I shall sow; she will reap I will pound, she will grind I shall bring flowers, she will make garlands Both of us will sing in

harmony with the running brooks. We shall smile in sympathy with the breeze and dance to the tune of thunders (dozes off, but is suddenly startled and wakes up). Did I fall asleep? Did I dream? Is sleeplessness deceiving me by keeping me happy in the palace of fancies? (laughing cruelly) Can there be a place untouched by the conflict of Aurva and Haihaya? There must be. Why not? Mother Yamuna will take us there Mother, will you not save your children? (sits quietly).

Suddenly Suvarna wakes up trembling and looking at him with frightened eyes, asks: "Oh Sagara, who is he? I am afraid."

SAGARA: Suvarna, there is no one else, only me.

SUVARNA (looks in all directions and trembles). I saw a fearful man in my dream He was so tall.

SAGARA (smiling): And?

SUVARNA (frightened) With a huge pile of white hair on his head, and a long white beard reaching to his waist.

SAGARA (trembling): Yes.

SUVARNA (in a trembling voice). Two flashing eyes like living coals I feel as if every limb of mine is on fire

SAGARA (unable to speak): Oh!

SUVARNA (frightened): What is it?

SAGARA (looking uncomfortably to all sides). Nothing. How far off is the sunrise?

SUVARNA. Oh, a long time yet (clinging to him). Let us go to sleep again.

SAGARA: No, we can't sleep.

SUVARNA (sleepily). Why?

SAGARA: Suppose there is no peace between your father and the grandfather?

SUVARNA. Then things will be difficult

SAGARA (timidly) : Suppose we run away from here. Then there will be no fear.

SUVARNA : How can I ? If I leave my father, he will go mad. But why do you talk like this ?

SAGARA (smiling in a melancholy way) : No, it was a passing thought. How can I separate you from your father ? (coming to a decision) I am going away, Suvarna ; it will soon be morning ; I am going

SUVARNA : Wait, the dawn has not broken yet.

SAGARA (firmly putting Suvarna aside) : Love, it is very late.

SUVARNA (looking with frightened eyes at the mountain from which bloody smoke is issuing) : What is this ?

SAGARA (frightened) : What is this ?

SUVARNA (trembling) : Your grandfather is angry.

In a slowly whitening dawn, reddish streaks of smoke rise and thunder is heard from the mountain top.

SAGARA (trembling) : Oh ! Suvarna, my love, let me go. Remember me awhile.

SUVARNA (gets up) : What is it ?

SAGARA (covers his eyes with his hands and says in a pitiful voice) : Suvarna, my love, it is useless to deceive you any further. Your night of perfect beauty is gone. My happiness is extinguished (gets up to go).

SUVARNA (catching hold of Sagara's hands) : Why ?

SAGARA (hastily) : Suvarna, what I told you of peace was untrue. Grandfather is on the war path. Soon flames will rise from all quarters. Look there, that village is in flames. Every Haihaya will now die.

SUVARNA (with trembling lips) . Lord, what about us ? You told me that grandfather will come here.

SAGARA . Yes, he will come (he embraces Suvarna) not to make peace but to kill Vitahavya and by my hands (He pushes Suvarna aside).

SUVARNA: To kill my father! You, Oh! You.

SAGARA: Let us go. Let me go. I shall not kill your father. Let me die myself.

SUVARNA (holding his hands) · You stay here. Who is going to touch you?

SAGARA: Look in that direction. It is in flames.

Suvarna looks. An uproar is heard from the distant towns.

SUVARNA: What is this?

SAGARA (teeth clenched): The massacre of the Haihayas. Let me go.

SUVARNA: But why?

SAGARA: To die.

SUVARNA (crying): Lord, you go to die? Then wait, I will go with you. Let us go together.

SAGARA (looking at her): That was what I was telling you. Are you coming?

From beneath the terrace a terrible voice is heard.

AURVA (unseen): Sagara, I have come.

SAGARA (striking his head with his hands): Oh! Gods!

SUVARNA. What is it? Who spoke?

SAGARA (confused and looking on all sides): Come. Let us go. Is there another way?

AURVA (unseen): Sagara, your father—

SAGARA (trembling): Come, we will leave by the back way.

SUVARNA (running after him) · It is closed. But who is he?

AURVA (unseen) —your master,—and the builder of Aryavarta —

SAGARA (taking hold of Suvarna's hands and whispering): Come with me. Across the terrace.

SUVARNA (frightened and running): Come.

SAGARA · This way, Suvarna.

SUVARNA (stands transfixed): Lord, there stands the old man of my dream. (Sagara turns).

Aurva stands at the end of the terrace with the Battle-Axe of the son of Jamadagni in his hands. From all sides leaps up fire. The clamour of voices is heard in the distance. There is a great uproar in the palace.

AURVA: I have yet to offer obsequies.

SAGARA: Grandfather himself! O, Gods!

SUVARNA: Aurva! Oh mother mine! (Suvarna faints)

AURVA: It is the dawn. Take this weapon blessed by the divine son of Jamadagni.

SAGARA (dazed): Master!

AURVA: Take this and conquer.

He forces the Battle-Axe into Sagara's hands.

Sagara trembles in every limb, clenches his teeth and holds the weapon firmly. He feels as if he is in flames and his eyes become bloodshot.

SAGARA (harshly): Grandfather, you want victory. You want the head of Vitahavya. Wait. I will bring it. Cruelty incarnate! May your wish be satisfied!

He runs madly away. The palace is enveloped in smoke. The uproar comes nearer. A smile is on Aurva's lips.

Sagara comes back like a mad man with the severed head of Vitahavya dripping blood. Flames are seen on all sides.

AURVA: Gods, Mother, Master! My resolve is being accomplished.

SAGARA (laughing like a demon): Master, here is one head you wanted. (throws the head at the feet of Aurva): I have yet to repay half the debt which you demanded as my teacher. I will give you more than you want. Wait. (He bends and sizes Suvarna's head by the hair and lifts

the weapon) Oh! Oh! Master (bending over her) she has preceded her father.

AURVA'S DISCIPLES (unseen): Victory to Emperor Sagara.

AURVA: Then Vitahavya was the last of the Haihayas.

SAGARA (in a fearfull voice): But I have yet to give you the master's fee.

He lifts the weapon to kill himself. Lightning flashes and thunder is heard overhead and the Battle-Axe disappears from the hand of Sagara. "Oh! Oh!" he shouts like a mad man.

AURVA (putting his hand on the shoulder of Sagara): Your Majesty! The great weapon of Jamadagni's mighty son has fulfilled its mission. The last of the Haihayas is dead. My mission is also fulfilled. Let me offer the obsequies. (chants).

SVADHA (bearing honey, ghee and milk). May you propitiate the ancestors.

Aurva makes the obsequies, offering the blood of Vithavya. Sagara looks on senselessly. Shanku, Ugra and other disciples arrive.

DISCIPLES: Victory to grandfather! Victory to Emperor Sagara.

AURVA (in a triumphant voice) Your Majesty, Victory to Aryavarta!

Sagara bends his head over his chest and says sorrowfully "Victory to Aryavarta!"

Aurva drags Sagara away and the others follow, singing the chant of Victory.

CHAPTER XII

TAPASVINI

After writing *Snehasambhrama*, Munshi waited a quarter of a century before novelising a social theme. In the interregnum, he wrote a number of Puranic novels and plays based on the ancient traditions of India, besides historical romances and autobiographical works. In 1957 was published the first two volumes of *Tapasvini*, a socio-political romance. With his technique perfected to a fine art, *Tapasvini* is the most mature of Munshi's social novels and can therefore be called his *magnum opus*. The third and concluding volume is in the press and is expected to be published shortly.

Tapasvini traces the social and political evolution of Gujarat from the Great Revolt of 1857 to April 1937 when the first Congress ministry took office in Bombay. The actual story occupies only the seventeen years from 1920 to 1937. But by using the cinematic technique of flash-backs, Munshi succeeds in depicting the socio-political history of the preceding six decades. For instance, Ganapatishankar Shastri is made to narrate a graphic account of the Great Revolt and Gujarat's reaction to it and of the slough of despond into which the people fell thereafter. Swamiraj tells Rajba the story of his early life and we get a vivid picture of the unsettled condition of Gujarat in the latter half of the nineteenth century with the Thakores and Talukdars fighting with each other.

Munshi has his own personal experiences to bank upon when he delineates the influence of Shri Aurobindo Ghosh on Gujarat and describes the Non-co-operation campaign, the Bardoli Satyagraha and the two successive Civil

Disobedience movements of the thirties. Though Munshi had etched the terrorist movement of the first decade of the present century in his earlier novel, *Svapnadrishtha*, it is in *Tapasvini* that we get a clearer picture of how the youth of Gujarat succumbed to the cult of terrorism under the influence of Aurobindo. The description of the *Bhawani Mandir* and of Shivshankar's activities in furtherance of it makes fascinating reading; it is a slice of the history of the freedom struggle.

Munshi paints a vivid picture of the unparalleled enthusiasm that gripped Bombay and Gujarat during the Salt Satyagraha when every house became a Congress-house and every man and woman a Congress volunteer. However, he is not blind to the blemishes that manifested themselves in the Congress during those hectic years. He knows that everything was not lovely in the Congress garden and he shows us both sides of the medal. Scrupulously and impartially does he juxtapose the popular upsurge and the mass heroism with the jealousies and the internal wranglings within the Congress. People who courted imprisonment were not in all cases self-sacrificing patriots; Munshi shows that a number of them spent their time in jail grumbling and quarrelling with others. It is a very realistic picture that Munshi has drawn alike of the strength and foibles of those who fought in the struggle for freedom. *Tapasvini* might well be called a saga of the Swaraj struggle.

The novel, however, is not devoted entirely to the political evolution of Gujarat: social conditions are not ignored. In Swamiraj's narration of his early life, we get a clear survey of the fossilized society of the latter half of the nineteenth century when outmoded social customs and a rigid caste hierarchy held society in thrall. The entire gamut of the social revolution is reached when the

blue-blooded aristocrat, Majiba, after an initial resistance, accepts as her daughter-in-law Godavari, a servant girl and a widow with an illegitimate child.

Even the changes that have come over the Gujarati language during the last hundred years are indicated. For instance, Swamiraj's talk is in that homely Gujarati of the closing years of the last century. The language of Ganapatishankar Shastri and of his grandson show by their contrast the evolution of their mother tongue.

Though *Tapasvini* may be termed a socio-political saga, it is first and foremost a story told by a story-teller *non-pareil*. The characters are alive and not wooden or stereotyped. The love-complex and the power-complex constitute the major overtones of this novel.

Ravi is enveloped in this power-complex. It is this complex which makes him thoroughly unscrupulous. He is a classic example of the dictum that a thirst for power is as intoxicating as power itself. But under the influence of Rajba, he develops a split personality in which Dr. Jekyll and Hyde fight for mastery. He is at bottom a good-hearted person whom the lust for power has turned into a ruthless robot.

In shining contrast to Ravi stands Udaya, the self-sacrificing idealist. The fates seem to have marked him out as their plaything. His wife Alice deserts him and runs away. Samarsingh plays a scurvy trick on him. Hanskuverba makes him look a fool before the Political Agent. Ravi is disloyal to him. His Gandhian idealism is misunderstood and his enemies spread the canard that he was a spy of the British Government. Society puts the worst possible interpretation on his relation with Sheela and the long-suffering Udaya thinks of running away from the world. Udaya displays a stoicism rarely to be found

and at long last he is united with Sheela. Another case of Munshi's *Avibhakta Atma*

Ganapatishankar Shastri represents all that is best and abiding in Indian culture and civilisation. He is a powerful character, powerfully sketched.

At the other end is Radha Raman, a de-nationalised Indian, aping western manners and customs. In some respects, he resembles Rama Gupta of Munshi's *Dhruvawaminidevi*. But unlike Rama Gupta, Radha Raman is wholly evil. He takes a fiendish delight in torturing his wife and through her, Udaya

Sheela is the eternal *Pativrata*. Not all the tortures inflicted by her husband nor all the calumnies spread by people like Matta Mayur make her swerve an iota from the path of righteousness. Uncomplainingly does she wear the crown of thorns and stoically does she invite 'thousands of lizards to climb on her body'. Her sufferings and mental torture bring tears to the eyes of the reader.

Rajba, on the other hand, is an unusual character. From her innate love of Beauty stems her hatred of everything evil and ugly. She is a psychic personality who can see and hear things which are invisible and inaudible to others. There is nothing strange or improbable in her having visions of Veda Vyasa. In our own days, we had Gandhiji repeatedly referring to his Inner Voice

The other characters are happily and picturesquely drawn. We love Bhim and his rumbustious ways. There were quite a few Janis in the struggle for freedom. Hanskuverba was certainly not an isolated case of the young wife of an old ruler seeking pleasure in the arms of younger men. Bhagavandas is a fine type of Gandhian who ennobles everything that he touches.

Tapasvini is an engrossing story of profound beauty and great power; and no apology is needed for giving

below a detailed summary of this moving novel.

* * *

When the story opens, Ganapatishankar Shastri, an octagenarian Brahman and the head of a *pathshala* at Madhavbagh, is living with his grandson in utter poverty in a garret nearby.

Shastri, while young, had studied at Banaras under a great scholar and had imbibed the truth that real learning is meant for the vindication of *dharma*. He was at Jhansi when the Great Revolt of 1857 broke out and he saw Maharani Lakshmibai immolating herself in the cause of freedom. Shastri escaped the holocaust that followed the Revolt and, after wandering for some years, came to Bombay where he was appointed as a teacher in a *pathshala*. In due course, he married and had a son.

Shivshankar, his son, had a brilliant academic career at the College at Baroda. There he came under the influence of Shri Aurobindo Ghosh and joined his *Bhavani Mandir*, the terrorist movement. He went to Calcutta and was very active in the movement. In a scuffle with the police, Shivshankar was shot dead. He left behind a young widow and an only son, Ravi. The widow died soon after and Shastri brought the orphaned Ravi to Bombay. Ravi was as intelligent as his father and studied Sanskrit and the *shastras* from his grandfather.

Ravi, in course of time, joined the government school. He was the most brilliant student in his class. He was able to stand first in all subjects, except English in which he was poor. At the first annual examination he stood first in all subjects, but it was with great difficulty that he managed to secure enough marks in English to pass. He had hoped to secure a scholarship, but he could not get one and he became disheartened.

Ravi goes to the temple of Laxminarayan and cries out his heart. With a heavy heart he goes out of the temple. Absent-mindedly, he tries to cross the road and is run over by a motor car. He loses his senses and falls down on the road.

When he comes to his senses and opens his eyes, he finds himself lying on a large cot, a maid servant standing beside his bed and a young lady sitting on a chair is feeding him with a spoon. He thinks that he is dreaming and again he closes his eyes. Deliriously he cries out, 'Oh Dadaji! Dadaji!' On hearing this, the young lady pats him on the head with her hand. He likes the soft touch of her hand and lies quiet. Then again he cries for his grandfather. The lady smiles sweetly at him and asks him the address of his grandfather. He had never heard such a melodious voice nor seen such a charming, affectionate smile.. He gives the name and address of his grandfather, and feeling exhausted, closes his eyes.

When he awakes, he sees a middle aged man talking in a loud voice with the lady. The man is dressed in European style. He comes to know that the name of the lady is Sheela. He hears the gentleman saying, "Sheela, where have you sent the car? Don't you know that it is time for me to go to the Court?" Ravi does not like the harsh tone of his voice. Sheela replies that she has sent the car to fetch the grandfather of Ravi and that, in a few moments, the car would be at their door.

"But why have you kept the boy here? You could have sent him to a hospital. Then there would have been no worry for us".

"It was due to my negligence that the boy was involved in an accident. I would not forgive myself if anything happened to him," Sheela replies.

"You are silly, Sheela," replies her husband, the

brilliant lawyer, Radha Raman.

Meanwhile the servant announces the arrival of Ganapatishankar, who comes into the room with the help of a student of his *pathshala*. He is wearing a small dhoti which barely reaches his knees and another one rests on his shoulders. Radha Raman looks at him with disdain. He does not like that a half-naked Shastri should have been admitted to his bungalow. He leaves the room in disgust.

Sheela narrates to Shastri how the accident had occurred. She says that the injuries sustained by the boy are of a minor nature and that within a few days he would be quite all right. With great difficulty, she makes Shastri, who had gone without food for three days, to take some fruits and then insists that he should stay in the bungalow till Ravi completely recovers. As Shastri refuses to stay in any of the carpeted rooms of the bungalow, Sheela makes arrangements for him in one of the small rooms kept for the servants.

After three days, Ravi could get up and walk about in the room. For the first time, he looks at his own reflection in a big mirror in the room and, finding how handsome looking he is, he falls in love with himself. His joy knows no bounds at the rich, new clothes that had been given him to put on. He had never known motherly or sisterly love and therefore on account of the nursing of Sheela, he feels as if he is transported to heaven.

When Ravi has completely recovered, Sheela informs Radha Raman that Ravi and Shastri would be leaving the next day. Radha Raman takes out from his wallet three currency notes of a hundred rupees each and offering them to Ganapatishankar, says, "Shastri, as your child was involved in an accident with our car and Sheela feels grieved about it, I give you three hundred rupees for treat-

ment.”

Ganapatishankar replies, “Ganapati has taken a vow not to touch money”

Radha Raman thinks he is mad Contemptuously he says, “Maharaj, you had better accept the sum. It will come useful to you.”

Shastri in a civil but firm tone replies, “I do not need money. What should I do with it? Kindly excuse me.”

Thinking that Radha Raman may feel humiliated, Sheela intervenes. “Shastriji, you need not accept the money But kindly accede to a request of mine. Ravi is very clever. He is proficient in all subjects except English and geography. My tutor will coach him up for the Senior Cambridge Examination within six months. Kindly allow me to engage my tutor for his tuition.”

Ganapatishankar replies, “Sister, we are under a great obligation to you But please allow us to keep our vow”

“What vow?” asks Sheela.

“We never charge fees for imparting knowledge, and never prosecute our studies on charity,” replies Shastri.

Ravi’s heart sinks within him. He thinks that if that opportunity is allowed to slip by, all his hopes of prosecuting his studies further will be frustrated. Sheela says to Ganapatishankar, “Shastriji, Ravi is highly proficient already For want of funds, he is not able to prosecute his studies.”

At last, Ganapatishankar yields to her importunity He thinks for a while and then observes, “There is nobody to teach grammar at the Radhakrishna *pathshala*. Let Ravi go there and teach grammar to the students You pay the *pathshala* whatever remuneration you deem proper for that work, and out of it, he can engage a tutor to coach him up in English”

Ravi is beside himself with joy. He feels as if the power and influence over people for which he has been yearning is within his grasp now

* * *

A brilliant student, keen sportsman and idol of his fellow-students, Radha Raman, after passing his B. A. examination went to England, to qualify for the bar. He stayed there for three years, had a 'good time', passed his examination with flying colours, then returned to India and joined the Bombay High Court. Within a short time, he became a leading lawyer at the Bombay bar. His early success went to his head. He became self-centred, singing always his own praise. He lived in western style and had a hearty contempt for things Indian. He ridiculed everything Hindu and despised Indian ways. He believed that life could be enjoyed only in the company of women of easy virtue, in drinking and living well.

At the age of thirty-five, Radha Raman lost his wife and later he married Sheela. Sheela was duly impressed by the intellect, personality and success of her husband, and decided to devote her life to looking after every comfort of her husband. For three years, they had a very happy time, during which Sheela worked hard to be a worthy wife to her husband. She became a devoted wife, determined to make her marriage a success. Radha Raman for his part was proud of his beautiful and educated wife, whose success in society satisfied his ego.

When Shastri and Ravi took leave of her, Sheela, for the first time in her life, had a sort of dissatisfaction with the way she and her husband were living. She had never come across a man who was so devoted to learning for its own sake as Shastri. He had shown complete indifference towards wealth and pomp. That saintly soul had exposed by contrast the true nature of her husband, who in his

presence appeared rude, ego-centric, intoxicated with his worldly success.

On the other hand, Radha Raman was extremely displeased with Sheela for having asked Ravi and Shastri to stay at their bungalow. He felt that Sheela had taken undue advantage of his latitude towards her.

When Sheela goes to Radha Raman's chamber one evening, she offers him a piece of almond given to her by Shastri as '*prasad*' for him. At this, Radha Raman becomes furious. He snatches the piece from Sheela's hand and throws it out of the window, and asks her rudely why she had visited that wretch of a Brahman. Sheela feels humiliated. She feels as if she would faint. Radha Raman, too angry to go home with her as is his wont, tells her that he is going out and that she need not wait for him as he would return home very late. He goes to his club, has a few whiskies with some of his friends and then visits one of his old mistresses. Late at night when he returns drunk, Sheela is still waiting for him. He does not even care to look at her and straight goes to bed with her.

Sheela had already come to know from the remarks of some of her friends that before she married Radha Raman, he used to make love to women of easy virtue.

When Sheela realises the way Radha Raman approached her that night, she remembers the remarks of her friends and she feels miserable at the thought that she has to share the stale approach of her husband with other women. This is a rude shock to her sensitive nature. She suffers intolerable torture of mind whenever Radha Raman touches her. "I feel as if a hundred lizards are climbing on my body," is her refrain whenever this mood seizes her.



Meanwhile, Ravi who is prosecuting his studies with the help given by Sheela, is highly dissatisfied with the condition in which he has to live. He thinks that it is the height of injustice that a highly respected scholar like his grandfather and a diligent and intelligent student like himself should live in penury and men and women like Radha Raman and Sheela should live in pomp and pleasure. He resolves to achieve power and with the help of power to make men and women like Radha Raman and Sheela grovel at his feet. He knows that mere money cannot secure power; for that, he must acquire scholarship.

One morning, he goes for a walk with his tutor, Bhagavandas. Bhagavandas informs him about the political and social conditions in the country and events of the outside world. He urges Ravi to come out of his old-world *pathshala* and make his own way in the outside world. After Bhagavandas leaves, he goes leisurely on his way thinking it is time that he did something. Lost in his own thoughts, he walks up to Parel. There he finds an emaciated Maratha youth in tattered clothes haranguing to a crowd of people. He seemed to be a fire-eater expounding Communist principles and inciting people against exploiters and capitalists. He makes a fiery appeal to his listeners, who are swayed by the power of his words. Ravi, while listening to him, realises the power that words can have over people. He resolves within himself that some day he would also sway the hearts of people with the power of his words.

When he returns home, he tells his grandfather that he feels it is time for him to go out into the world, kindle the fire of enthusiasm by the magic of his words and knowledge in the hearts of lethargic people, drive out the foreigner from this sacred land and spread the ancient religion and culture once again to the four cor-

ners of the country

Ganpatishankar Shastri is overjoyed at hearing this and tells Ravi the story of his past and how Ravi's father had laid down his life in the cause of his country and *Dharma*. Believing that Ravi is going to live for the vindication of *Dharma*, he blesses Ravi with all his heart and teaches him the art of rhetoric. Ravi, however, only wants to secure power, he cares little for the triumph of culture or religion. He is pained at deceiving his grandfather, but, for fear of hurting the feelings of his grandfather, he keeps the secret to himself.

* * *

Udaya Solanki, the son of the late Captain Pratapsinh, a near relative of the Ruler of Manigadh, returns to India after qualifying for the bar in England. While in England he had married Alice, the daughter of Dr. Chaudhari, a Punjabee, and his English wife. Udaya, Alice and their little son Karan are received at the Mole Station by Udaya's widowed mother, Padmakuverba, his sister Rajba, his younger brother Bhim and maternal uncle Bhupatsinha who is a Government officer and at whose residence Udaya's mother and sister have put up.

The first thing that Majiba (Udaya's mother) does is to take him with his English wife and son to the temple at Mahalakshmi. There, they offer 'puja' to the Goddess in accordance with proper rites and ceremonies. To Alice, all this appears barbaric and nauseating. Karan, the young child, however, takes at once to his grandmother and when Alice and Udaya go to their rooms in the Taj Mahal Hotel, he refuses to go with them and goes instead, with his grandmother, to Bhupat's place. Alice feels as if she is all alone in a strange barbaric world and that a great gulf has suddenly arisen not only between herself

and her husband but also between herself and her son.

* * *

For the last three years, Sheela has been passing through an ordeal of fire. Her husband, Radha Raman, is now in the habit of going to his club, having a few drinks there and returning home late at night after visiting some harlot. At such times, she suffers a deep sense of self-mortification. She feels hurt and humiliated. Nevertheless, she remains a devoted wife trying to drown her miseries in the thought of rendering whole-hearted loyalty to her husband. In due course, she realises that Radha Raman also cannot do without her. Pride in having a cultured, accomplished and beautiful wife is absolutely essential to feed his ego.

The only solace for Sheela is the companionship of her erstwhile tutor, Bhagavandas and his wife Nirmalaben. The old tutor is in every sense a gentleman. He regards Sheela, who had been his pupil for ten long years, as his own daughter. Although Sheela is no longer his regular student, he spends an hour every day with her and reads out to her stimulating passages from some book or the other. He is also an ardent admirer of Gandhiji. His son, Jagjivan, is a regular inmate of Gandhiji's Sabarmati Ashram and the proud father always talks about Gandhiji to Sheela. He tells her that Gandhiji is making preparations for a mass movement at Bardoli. Sheela wants to go there and see Gandhiji. But Radha Raman has nothing but contempt for Gandhiji and she, therefore, cannot ask him to let her go. She also wants to go and meet Shastri and Ravi, but, knowing how Radha Raman hates them, she dared not meet them either.

Once she is taken by surprise when Radha Raman himself asks her to call Shastri to his place. But the

cat is out of the bag when she knows the reason why he wants to see Shastri. He wants his help in solving some difficult problem of Hindu Law and, if he could do so, he says he is likely to win a very important case in the High Court. Sheela tells him that Shastri never goes to other persons' houses, but that if he wants Shastri to help him, he will have to go to his residence. Radha Raman could not conceive of a man like him going to a *pathshala pandit*. It is ultimately decided that Bhagavandas should go and, instead of Shastri, bring Ravi, who, Sheela assures him, also has by that time become a profound scholar of *Shastras*. Radha Raman asks Bhagavandas to tell Ravi that he would be paid handsomely for the help given by him.

Next morning, Bhagavandas reports to Radha Raman that Ravi has refused to accompany him saying that he would go to Radha Raman's place only when he is able to make such conceited persons eat the humble pie. Bhagavandas also informs Radha Raman that he has submitted his resignation as a teacher and is going to Bardoli to join Gandhiji's campaign. Radha Raman looks at him contemptuously and, addressing Sheela, says, "Sheela, now, you will get rid of this Gandhi-mad fellow."

Sheela opens her mouth to protest but before she can say anything, the servant comes up with a visiting card and Radha Raman, having seen it, says to Sheela "Bhupat has come to see me". Sheela hastily goes to Bhagavandas who has already left the room, and asks him to wait for her on the ground floor.

Bhupatsinha is an old friend of Radha Raman. He has promised Udaya to introduce him to Radha Raman so that the young lawyer can read in his chambers as a 'devil'.

Bhupat comes to Radha Raman's bungalow with Udaya and Majiba who are cordially received by Sheela.

Bhupat introduces Udaya to Radha Raman and then requests him to allow Udaya to work with him as his 'devil.' After some heistation, Radha Raman agrees but he says that he would not able to help Udaya very much; a young lawyer would have to make his own way.

His behaviour towards Majiba and Udaya is so supercilious that Sheela makes a mental note of the difference between his rude behaviour and the highly refined manners of Majiba.

After a short while, Radha Raman says that he has an appointment and if Udaya has no objection, he would take him to his club and introduce him to some of his friends there. Majiba, however, says that she wants to go to Ganapatishankar Shastri, whom they look upon as a family elder, to pay their respects to him and that she wants to take Udaya with her. "As you please," says Radha Raman loftily and leaves them and goes to his room.

When Sheela learns that Majiba is going to Shastri, she expresses her desire to go with her. She goes to change her dress and, on the way to her bed room, she meets Radha Raman who asks her where she is going. On learning from her that she is going to Ganapatishankar's, he loses his temper and forbids her to go to his place and warns her that if, inspite of his injunction, she does so, he would not allow her to live with him.

Sheela is now in a defiant mood and, accompanied by Majiba and others, goes down, having made up her mind to go to Shastri's place. There she sees Bhagavandas waiting for her and asks him when he proposes to go to Bardoli. "To night," replies Bhagavandas. "I am going with you. Please get a ticket for me also," Sheela says and leaves him and goes with Majiba and Udaya.

At Majiba's residence, they see Rajba dancing and

singing hymns of Mirabai. They take her and Bhim and also Alice with them and they all go to Shastri.

Shastri receives them with sincere affection and gives his blessings to Udaya. Sheela is again struck by Shastri's learning and specially by his sense of self-respect and mental poise and her pride of wealth and social position evaporates in his presence. Udaya feels that Shastri combined in him all that was best in the past ages and that he was a true representative of the essence of Aryan culture. But to Alice, Shastri appears a stupid, old, toothless fool. She thinks he is a witchdoctor.

Ravi, who is also there, feels insulted, as the visitors do not take sufficient notice of him. Udaya tries to establish friendliness by telling Ravi that his father and Ravi's father had studied together in Baroda but Ravi repulses his friendly overture.

Ravi's hatred for the rich increases. He resolves to bring all those conceited rich people to their knees by securing power. After the visitors have left, he requests his grandfather to allow him to go out into the wide world and do something. Shastri replies that he has been waiting all his life for such a moment. He tells him that when Ravi's father went to Calcutta to join the terrorist movement, he had given the name and address of some person with the instruction that if and when he found it necessary, he should write to that person. Ravi finds out the name and address of that person and, under instructions from Shastri, addresses him a letter.

After a few days, an elderly gentleman comes to see Shastri. He is Sanyal, a friend of Ravi's father. Originally he had been a follower of Shri Aurobindo, but later he had become a Communist and is now the Secretary of the Politburo of the Party. He carries on conversation with Shastri for a long time in whispers so that Ravi can-

not hear what they talk. Then Shastri introduces Sanyal to Ravi and tells him that he should follow his advice. Sanyal gives a recommendatory note to Ravi and asks him to see the person to whom the note is addressed. He further says that the work that is going to be entrusted to him is of a responsible nature and that he will be entitled to have his monthly salary from the next month. He also asks Ravi to give up his name Ravishankar Tripathi as it sounds too out-of-date and adopt instead, that of Ravidas Chudgar.

Next day Ravi sees Manohar Mathurakar to whom the note is addressed. Mathurakar is a prominent worker in the Communist party. He asks Ravi to speak at a small meeting arranged that night at a suburban place. Ravi at first feels a little flustered, but his maiden speech, devoted to an unrestrained abuse of the rich, is successful beyond expectations. When he goes home, he tells his grandfather with becoming pride how his very first speech has made a deep impression on the minds of the people. He gives a detailed description of everything but leaves an impression on the mind of his grandfather as if he had borne the message of the ancient sages to the people, which of course he had not done. He feels a little ill-at-ease for thus deceiving his grandfather, who, in giving blessings, quotes from the sacred book the maxim that "Truth always wins."

Next day Ravi finds that his grandfather has sometime during the night quietly breathed his last.

After the death of his grandfather, Ravi leaves the place and goes to live in a chawl at Mazagaon. After a month, he begins to receive his salary. Gradually, he gives up his old style of living and adopts the new ways as be-fitted a 'comrade'. For four years he works as an active member of the party and tours the whole country for party work and he becomes one of the promising members in the

Communist hierarchy. On his return, he is appointed the man in charge of the Matunga office of the Communist Party.

Next day, on his going to his office, a tall and lean girl of about twentyfive years of age comes to him. The Politburo Secretary, Sanyal, had sent a message with her to Ravi that she would work with him at the Matunga office and stay with him as his wife, as there was a warrant of arrest against her.

Mona had been to Russia and she wants to 'go underground' for some time. Ravi is taken aback by the boldness of the girl. At first, he feels very awkward living in the same room with her. But gradually he becomes accustomed to the new set-up and begins even to like her. Mona takes the name of Reva and lives with him as his wife. Together they—she with her deep insight and he with his power of speech—carry out the party work with efficiency. Mona does not believe in marriage but she has taken a fancy for Ravi and Ravi also has developed a tender feeling for her. Both of them therefore decide to live as husband and wife, without getting married and continue the experiment in companionship till they get tired of each other.

* * *

Maharaja Gangasinhji of Manigadh is seriously ill. He has come to Bombay for medical treatment and lives in a rented bungalow at Pedder Road. Gangasinhji is the son of the uncle of Udaya's father and treats all the members of his family as his own. He has no child, and regards Majiba as his younger sister. Once, he had expressed his desire to adopt either Udaya or his younger brother Bhim as his son but meanwhile he married a forest guard's daughter and the idea of adopting Udaya or Bhim

was dropped. The new Maharani, Hanskuvarba, declares that she is pregnant and at this happy news the Maharaja is transported with delight.

Captain Samarsingh, who has recently returned from England, is a near relative of the Maharaja of Premkot. He is a good looking sportsman, and he loves the pleasures of life. The Maharaja of Premkot too is childless and he is on his deathbed. All his relatives are plotting to succeed to his 'gadi'; Samar also is one of the candidates. Bhupat, who knows this, wants Rajba, the sister of Udaya, to be married to Samar and for that reason, Majiba has brought Rajba with her to Bombay.

Bhupat, Majiba, Udaya, Alice, Rajba and Bhim go to see the ailing Maharaja of Manigadh. Udaya is deeply impressed by the new Maharani, whom he sees there for the first time. But Rajba takes an immediate aversion to her. The Maharani urges Majiba to fix up the engagement of Rajba with Captain Samarsingh at the earliest opportunity.

Next day Bhupat invites Samar to dinner. Rajba's whole attitude undergoes a complete change after her return from the Maharaja's bungalow. She becomes another Mirabai. Udaya can see that she has done so in order to save herself from marriage with Samar. Even when Samar comes to dinner, she behaves like one who has dedicated her whole life to the worship of God, although Majiba is displeased with her strange behaviour.

After the dinner is over, Samar asks Majiba when she wants the engagement to take place. Majiba replies that she has, at the suggestion of her astrologer, fixed the next Monday for the happy event. Samar suggests that the engagement should take place in the presence of the Maharaja and the Maharani.

Next day, word comes that the Maharaja's condition

is worse. They all go to see him. The doctors prescribe blood transfusion. The Maharani insists that she only be allowed to donate her blood. The doctors try to persuade her to give up the idea as she is in a delicate condition. But she is firm. "I will, on no account, allow the royal blood of my lord to be polluted with any inferior blood", she says. The doctors have therefore to yield to her. The Maharaja, madly in love with the young Maharani, makes Majiba, Bhupat and Udaya to take a pledge to help her in securing the 'gadi' for her son, in case a son is born to her.

After the others have left, the Maharani calls Udaya and tells him, "Samar will soon be your brother-in-law. I want your sister Rajba to become a Maharani. But it is not easy for Samar to secure the 'gadi' of Premkot. For that purpose, Samar needs a lot of money. With great difficulty, I have persuaded the Maharaja to lend a sum of eight lakhs of rupees to him. Samar has given me a signed document in which he has stated that he has taken that sum from the Maharaja as a trustee of myself and that after a period of two years he would return the sum to me whenever I demand it." She then asks Udaya to attest the document as a witness

After the document is duly attested by Udaya and the Maharani's mother, she asks the treasurer to get the required amount and hands over eight lakhs of rupees to Samar. Udaya, however, does not like the familiar glances which the Maharani exchanges with Samar.

Next day, Udaya and others learn that all the talk about Samar's engagement with Rajba had been a hoax and that Samar has left Bombay. Udaya sees through his game and realises that he has been made an instrument in getting eight lakhs of rupees for Samar. Rajba heaves a sigh of relief, begins to sing Mirabai's song to the effect that "all the ghosts have departed now and God looks to

her welfare," and breaks out into wild hysterical laughter and faints.

* * *

Udaya now seriously applies his mind to achieve success in his profession but the gulf between Alice and himself widens more and more every day as she has set her mind against Indian ways and Indian contacts and would not take any interest in the career of Udaya. She comes in contact with a 'gay bird' named Ramchandani, falls in love with him and decides to run away with him to England.

Meanwhile, the Maharaja and Maharani leave Bombay for Manigadh. Majiba, Rajba and Bhim also have left for their native place, Rajkot. Udaya receives a letter from Majiba asking him to come to Rajkot as she feels worried about the health of Rajba who, she informs him, has fainting fits every third or fourth day and utters many strange things. Majiba also writes to him that recently during such a fit, she said that some great harm was going to be done to him by a bejewelled lady and a pleasure-loving young man. Majiba further informs Udaya that the Maharaja lay on his death bed and that the Maharani also wants to see him urgently. She, therefore asks him to come to Rajkot first and then go to Manigadh.

Udaya decides to leave for Rajkot next day but Alice refuses to go with him. Udaya thinks that she wants to stay behind in order to see off her friend Ramchandani who is shortly leaving for England. He asks her to join him at Rajkot after a few days and takes the son, Karan, with him

Ramchandani and Alice had decided that a few days after Ramchandani reaches England, she should also leave India and join him there. But now that Udaya, with Karan, has left for Rajkot, she changes her mind and deci-

des to accompany Ramchandani. She accordingly books a passage for herself on the same boat. Ramchandani has never taken this flirtation seriously and wants to shake Alice off. When Alice insists on accompanying him, he secretly gets his passage cancelled and Alice finds herself alone on the boat when it leaves Bombay.

Udaya, who does not know anything about this affair, goes to Rajkot and Rajba breaks down on seeing him. Sobbing she says: "You are in great danger. Prepare for it."

A servant from Maharani Hanskuverba is waiting there for Udaya. The Maharaja is dead. Ramsinha, a near relative of the late Maharaja, is trying to prove that the Maharani is not pregnant in fact, but only feigning. To counteract this propaganda, the Maharani wants Udaya to see the Political Agent immediately. Accordingly, Udaya goes and sees the Political Agent but is flabbergasted to learn from that it is a hoax on the part of the Maharani and that she never had conceived. Udaya feels disgusted at the way he is tricked and decides never to have anything to do with the Maharani in future.

* * *

In spite of the fact that Udaya is now steadily climbing the ladder of success so far as his profession is concerned, he is far from happy. He suffers from acute mental anguish on account of the treatment given to him by Alice. Rajba sympathises with him but can do little to help him out of his mental suffering. Majiba feels worried about both of them. She urges him to get a divorce from Alice and find a suitable girl and marry her. But Udaya pays no heed to her advice. Majiba is also worried about the strange malady from which she thinks Rajba suffers.

After Alice left Udaya, Majiba and Rajba with young Karan come and stay with him at Bombay, Bhim having joined the Military School at Dehra Dun Rajba joins a college, but is not eager to pass her examinations. She lives as if she is totally unconcerned with worldly affairs. At times she sees sights and hears voices which are invisible and inaudible to others. She cannot bear the sight or even the idea of any kind of evil or ugliness. Udaya can detect a yearning for Beauty in all her thoughts and actions.

Once while Udaya suffers acute mental anguish and cannot go to sleep, he pours out the story of his broken heart on paper. He works at it and, before he is aware of it, he has written out a full-fledged novel. He shows it to his friend Suryashankar Joshi, a well-known critic and editor of a monthly magazine. Suryashankar likes it immensely and he publishes it serially in his magazine. The story entitled *Bhagna Hridaya* (Broken Heart) attracts the attention of all literary figures and 'Piyush'—the pen-name under which Udaya gets his story published—becomes a household word in a short time. The critics acclaim that a new and dazzling star has arisen on the literary firmament and they try to find out the person who wrote under the pen-name of 'Piyush'.

Majiba fears that Rajba is suffering from some kind of mania and that she will some day go mad. Eminent doctors and psychiatrists are consulted but they cannot diagnose her disease. Udaya ultimately realises that there is nothing wrong with either the physical or mental condition of Rajba and that she, through the purity and nobility of her soul, could, when she goes into a trance, see things which are hidden from the sight of ordinary persons. He therefore follows her advice on all matters

Accordingly, when on receiving a letter from Alice, requesting him not to defend himself in a divorce suit which she intends to file against him in a court of law, he drafts a letter refusing her request, Rajba by a second sight reads his thoughts and advises him not to defend the suit but allow Alice to have her way, and he readily consents.

Doctors and psychiatrists having failed, Majiba looks for spiritual remedies to cure the strange malady of Rajba. She goes on a pilgrimage, taking Rajba with her, in search of saints and spiritual leaders who may be able to cure her. On their way to Shri Aurobindo's Ashram, they come to Malsar. There Majiba learns that there lives in Dhebaria, a couple of miles from Karnali, on the bank of the river Narmada, a venerable saint named Swamiraj who works miracles. Majiba and Rajba therefore go to Dhebaria and are received by Swamiraj.

Tall, well-built Swamiraj, who is nearly seventy years old, does not look like an ordinary sanyasi. Rajba feels as if she had known Swamiraj since her birth and is completely at home in his presence. There are two temples in the yard known as 'Swamiraj's Vada.' One of the temples dedicated to God Chandramauli is meant for the public and other is kept for the exclusive use of Swamiraj. There, he repairs twice every day and offers *puja* but none knows the nature of his *puja* ceremony.

Once, at the request of Rajba, Swamiraj takes her with him to his private temple and allows her to watch from a distance. She is surprised at the miraculous things that she sees as if Swamiraj is worshiping some invisible but living presence. In reply to her question, Swamiraj narrates the romantic story of his early life. He tells her how though a young sanyasi ostensibly, he used to go in company with the men of the Thakor of Dhebaria at night, and plunder people; how he

fell in love with Chandan, a low-caste woman, who adored him as if he were her God; and how by a supreme act of self-sacrifice, she saved his life at the cost of her own while he was on the point of being arrested. Since then, he says, he had lived in her living presence, gone on a pilgrimage, wandered all over the country and ultimately come and stayed at Dhebaria where he had first met his beloved who had now become a symbol of Divinity for him.

He had realised God through her living presence.

Knowing how Rajba cannot tolerate anything that is ugly and how she becomes restless at the sight, or even the idea of sin and ugliness, he tells her about the secret of achieving peace of mind. He says to her: 'Whenever sin has raised its head, God has shown us the way to extract virtue out of it. There is nothing ennobling like faith. Instead of yearning for beauty, one should cultivate the faith that there is beauty everywhere. That faith would purge everything of sin and ugliness and convert them to Truth and Beauty.'

After some time, when Majiba and Rajba leave Dhebaria, Rajba has secured peace of mind. She is now fortified with undying faith that ugliness is but a struggle through which beauty emerges through faith.

* * *

Sheela goes with Bhagavandas to Rani Vedchhi a small village near Bardoli. There she sees the villagers fired with an unprecedented enthusiasm. They have discarded their old deities in favour of Gandhiji. Thence she goes to Bardoli and sees Gandhiji and is deeply impressed by the magnetic personality. She feels as if her course of life has taken a new turn for the better. It is while she is with Gandhiji that news comes of the Chauri Chaura outrage and she sees Gandhiji suspending his

campaign of mass civil disobedience.

Sheela goes back to Rani Vedchhi with Bhagavandas and his son, Jagjivan, when Gandhiji is arrested. Sheela receives a wire from Radha Raman begging of her to return home as he feels miserable without her. Accordingly, she returns to Bombay. Though she and Radha Raman live together, Sheela is fed up with the 'gay dog life' that Radha Raman is living and she yearns for the simple and soul-stirring atmosphere of Rani Vedchhi and Bardoli.

Gradually, the gulf of difference between the two widens more and more. Udaya who frequently goes to Radha Raman's place is impressed with the tender and quiet personality of Sheela. Sheela then starts a 'charka' class in a flat near the residence of Bhagavandas. A number of people belonging to various professions and classes often gather together at Bhagavandas's flat where Udaya has occasions to come in closer contact with Sheela.

Volume II

In October 1927, Udaya proceeds to Matheran for a holiday. On the way he meets Matta Mayur, a great Gujarati poet, who is highly egotistic and intolerant. They become good-friends and at Matheran they put up at the same hotel, 'Parvatashram'.

Radha Raman and Sheela too have come to Matheran for the holidays and they call on Udaya at his hotel, and take him away to live with them in their bungalow.

No one can boisterously enjoy a holiday as Radha Raman when the great man finds himself in a happy mood. Radha Raman happens to be in a holiday mood during these Diwali days and tries to make Sheela happy. Udaya also joins in holiday-making and develops great admiration for Sheela's accomplishments. Sheela sings songs which

Radha Raman likes and as Udaya happens to know them, he also joins in them.

Udaya, to his great surprise, finds that Sheela is an ardent admirer of 'Piyush,' the unknown author of *Bhagna Hridaya*. Drawn by her very cordial and appreciative attitude, Udaya confesses to her that 'Piyush' is his pen-name and that recently he has written another novel entitled '*Tapasvini*'. At the request of Sheela, he hands over his own copy of the book to her.

Two days later, on the Diwali day, as they are returning from their morning walk, they see Samarsingh, now the Maharaja of Premkot, coming out from the railway station. He is in difficulties and he has come to Matheran in order to consult Radha Raman. As they are exchanging greetings, two Anglo-Indian girls also come out of the railway station. Sheela feels that Radha Raman winked at one of them and suddenly her holiday mood disappears. She turns pale as all the horrors of 'climbing lizards' give her a creeping sensation.

Everyone in Saurashtra knew about the great scandal at Premkot. After the death of the Maharaja of Manigadh, Hanskuverba had thrown all restraint aside and gone to Premkot to live openly with Samarsingh. After some time, Samarsingh had got tired of her but she had insisted that he should now repay Rs. 8,00,000 which had been advanced to him by the late Maharaja of Manigadh in trust for her and she would not leave Premkot.

In the evening, Radha Raman and Udaya go to Samarsingh's bungalow. Udaya is asked to take a stroll while the other two have a confidential chat between themselves. After some time, he is called in and Radha Raman tells him that the Maharaja is very anxious to marry his sister, Rajba. Udaya is indignant at this insulting proposal, for

neither Majiba nor he had forgiven Samarsingh for the scurvy trick he had played on the family when he encouraged them to believe that he was anxious to marry Rajba and once he had secured the eight lakhs that he needed, broke with them. This offer, however, is only a bait for Udaya. Radha Raman then comes to the point when he asks Udaya to make an affidavit that he has *not* attested the document by which Samarsingh had acknowledged that he held Rs. 8,00,000 in trust for Hanskuyerba. Udaya refuses to do so and walks out.

While going out, Udaya comes across the two Anglo-Indian girls, one of whom asks him the way to the bungalow of Maharaja of Premkot. They ask him whether the Maharaja is alone and when he replies that he has a friend with him, they giggle. Udaya had heard of Radha Raman's amourous proclivities and he now understands why Sheela had turned pale in the morning when she saw the two girls coming out of the station.

Sheela is waiting for her husband and Udaya at the bungalow. Seeing Udaya return alone, she is a little upset. She asks him whether the Maharaja and Radha Raman are alone. Udaya is taken aback and tells about the two Anglo-Indian girls. Sheela feels crushed and goes away to her room. Udaya realises the grim tragedy of her life. After two hours, she returns to the drawing room, when they try to talk lightly of Udaya's novel *Tapasvini* which she had read in the afternoon.

The novel *Tapasvini* centres round a priestess of a temple at Ujjain known as Tapasvini who is as beautiful as she is learned and as staunch a *brahmacharini* as she is noted for her *tapas*. A poet comes to Ujjain and meets Tapasvini. They discover that they are one and indivisible. Tapasvini gives up her vow of celibacy and makes love to the poet. When her guru protests, she says

that she has found the highest fulfilment in her love for the poet. The king of Ujjain, who worships Tapasvini for her spiritual qualities and loves her for her physical charms, finds her and the poet sleeping together and cuts off their heads.

Sheela is very much moved by the story and after some conversation, asks Udaya to go back to the hotel as there is no third room in the bungalow for him. He understands the significance of the request and respecting the confidence, gets ready to leave. Sheela goes down to the gate to see him off when they see a couple walking together, who flash their torchlight on them. The couple, smothering their laughter, go away and Udaya returns to the hotel.

Two days earlier, Matta Mayur, the poet friend of Radha Raman and Udaya, was sitting in the room which he is sharing with Udaya. He has been upset by a very unfavourable review of one of his poetical works which has appeared in a magazine. In the magazine he also finds a review of *Tapasvini*, a novel by an unknown author, Piyush. The review hails Piyush as an outstanding writer and *Tapasvini* as a land-mark in literature. Matta Mayur opens a parcel that has come for him, finds *Tapasvini* in it and reads it from cover to cover. In his opinion, the novel is highly immoral and the next day, he phones Kalidas, the Editor of *Sanatana Yuga* to tear the new novel to pieces in his journal.

Radha Raman and Sheela are to leave Matheran the next morning and Udaya goes to the station to see them off, but finds Radha Raman, Samarsingh and the two Anglo Indian girls there but not Sheela. Radha Raman tells him that Sheela cannot leave as she is not well. He however requests Udaya to see that Sheela returns to Bombay on Wednesday as Radha Raman is throwing a big party to

which the Governor has been invited.

Udaya goes to Sheela who, now cool and collected, tells him that she is coming to his hotel to stay there. She narrates to him her tale of woe : how she was charmed by Radha Raman's eloquence, intelligence and personality, how she looked to every need and comfort of his, how Radha Raman could not do without mistresses. Sheela tells him how she feels as if a hundred lizards are climbing over her body whenever Radha Raman makes advances to her and how the horror of stale kisses and embraces tortures her soul all the time. She confesses to Udaya that she can no longer live in the same house with her husband and tells him that she has decided to leave her husband. Udaya remonstrates with her, but Sheela's decision is unchanged. Accordingly, she goes to the hotel in the afternoon.

When the post arrives, Matta Mayur shows Udaya and Sheela, Kalidas's scathing article about *Tapasvini*, which he had characterized as immoral and obscene. Udaya and Sheela are shocked but say nothing. At this time, a lady who is staying in the same hotel, comes along smoking a cigarette and tries to make friends with the poet, Udaya and Sheela. She is none other than Mona, the comrade of Ravi, who hides himself in his room, afraid of being recognised by Udaya and Sheela. The poet delivers a harangue to Mona about the Aryan ideals of a woman.

Meanwhile, Kalidas, the editor, comes and tells the poet that 'Piyush' is none other than his friend Udaya. The poet angrily shouts for the manager asking him to give him another room so that he may not live in the same suffocating atmosphere poisoned by Udaya's presence. Not content with that, he slaps Udaya. Mona now mentions to him how she had flashed the torch on Udaya and

Sheela as they were standing at the gate of Radha Raman's bungalow almost at midnight and that Sheela, whom the poet praised as the essence of Aryan purity, was but a mistress of Udaya.

Ravi, coming to know that his old acquaintances, Udaya and Sheela, are living in the same hotel, suddenly leaves Matheran with Mona.

Matta Mayur, furious at discovering the wicked 'Piyush' in Udaya, writes a thundering article in Kalidas's *Sanatana Yuga* branding him as a corruptor of morals and appealing to Gujarat to rise and destroy the snake which was poisoning its life and culture. The article also hints at Udaya's relation with Sheela.

The events of the day are too much for Udaya and he develops high fever. The poet has gone for a walk; and a messenger from Kalidas brings two advance copies of the next day's *Sanatana Yuga* for him and leaves them with Sheela. Sheela reads the article on Udaya in the journal and shudders at the poisonous stuff. She immediately realises that the article would be read by the whole of Bombay the next day and Udaya's reputation and, with it, his career would be ruined. She comes to the decision to save him at all cost. If she is with Radha Raman, Udaya is safe.

She comes to Udaya's room where she finds him lying in feverish sleep. She sits near him for some time with tears in her eyes and hears him muttering, "Rajba, you are coming! Yes, come!" Sheela steels her heart. She writes a note to Udaya saying, "the *tapas* of Tapasvini has not ended. I have still to invite thousands of lizards on my body."

When Udaya wakes up from his feverish sleep, he is shocked to learn from the manager of the hotel that Sheela has left for Bombay. Then he reads her note. He

realises that she has sacrificed herself so that his name may not come into disrepute.

* * *

As Sheela is getting into the train at Neral on her way to Bombay, she finds a tall, queenly young woman stepping out of the train Samarsingh, the Maharaja of Premkot, and Majiba are with her and they introduce the young woman, Rajba, to Sheela.

Majiba and Rajba had been to Pondicherry where they had *darshan* of Shri Aurobindo. Rajba had then recovered her poise and was thereafter self-composed. In Poona, Rajba wakes up at 2 o'clock in the morning and, to the surprise of Majiba, says that Udaya wants her as he is seriously ill and Rajba decides to go to Matheran. When they reach the Poona station, they meet the Maharaja of Premkot who invites them to travel with him in his saloon. They all travel together in the saloon on their way to Bombay. Rajba gets down at Matheran, while the rest continue their journey to Bombay.

When Rajba comes to the hotel, Udaya is down with pneumonia and is delirious. At this time, a drama is being enacted in the hotel. The son of the hotel manager is kicking a servant girl. Matta Mayur, the poet, and the manager's wife are encouraging him. Rajba intervenes and the girl, Godavari, tells her story. She is a child widow who had an illegitimate child, which she had been concealing. She had been driven out of the house where she was employed and had joined the hotel staff. She used to keep the child in a trunk in her room in the servants' quarters. This was found out and she is now being driven out.

Rajba goes and takes the child and orders milk for it. She reserves a room next to hers, for Godavari and her

child She is fondling the child when the poet upbraids her for doing something so un-Aryan. Rajba retorts that the child, herself and Bhagavan Vyasa, the founder of Aryan ideals, would not approve of what the poet has said. Vyasa himself was illegitimate! In disgust, the poet leaves Matheran.

Udaya's condition is very serious. Rajba sits in meditation and surrenders herself entirely to God. She beseeches Him to take her life and spare her brother's. She has a vision of Sri Krishna which transforms itself into that of Veda Vyasa. She hears a voice saying "Call Sheela".

* * *

Sheela is the cynosure of all eyes at Radha Raman's garden party, which is a resounding success. Radha Raman is very happy as his ego has been satisfied. After dinner, she wants to retire, but Radha Raman insists on keeping her company. She yields to his advances, undergoing self-torture. After her husband leaves her, she is wretched. Only the thought that she has saved Udaya's reputation and career sustains her. She cries the whole night. Her heart is with Udaya. She realises that she loves him.

In the morning, she receives a telephone call from Rajba at Matheran saying that Udaya is very dangerously ill, that he is practically unconscious and that she must come to Matheran immediately. Sheela asks how she can when she had come only the previous day and what excuse she can give to her husband. Rajba brushes aside all excuses and says that Sheela must come. "*It is a mandate,*" she utters in a thrilling, mysterious voice, which sends Sheela's whole being a-quiver.

Immediately, Sheela is called to the drawing room

where Radha Raman is seated with Samarsingh, the Maharaaja of Premkot. Samarsingh has told Radha Raman the later developments. Hanskuverba would not leave his palace in Premkot in which she had been housed. The Political Agent, however, had insisted that she should go, as the Viceroy was coming and if she didn't go, Samarsingh would lose his gadi. So Samarsingh had her removed to a distant fort, searched her and recovered the trust-deed which was found on her body. She had, however, escaped from the fort and sent a telegram to the Governor who was expected to order an enquiry in the matter.

Samarsingh seeks the help of Radha Raman. The latter says that the only way-out was to get Udaya to make an affidavit that he has attested no such trust-deed as alleged by Hanskuverba; and if that is to be done, Samarsingh must marry Rajba. Samarsingh, who has lost his heart to the queenly and beautiful Rajba, jumps at the very idea. But the question is how to marry her. Radha Raman suggests sending Sheela to Matheran as she is like a sister to Udaya and has great influence over him.

It is at this time that Sheela comes into the drawing room and Radha Raman asks her to go to Matheran! Sheela is for the moment dazed, the mandate conveyed by Rajba is being obeyed! But the next moment, she is very happy. She agrees and leaves for Matheran. When she reaches Matheran, Udaya's condition is worse. Sheela, throwing all prudery to the winds, nurses him as if he is hers and he begins to improve.

After a few days, Radha Raman and Samarsingh come to Matheran. Samarsingh makes many efforts to talk to Rajba but his efforts are fruitless. At this time a telegram is received from Jagjiwan, son of Bhagavandas, stating that Gandhiji had received a telegram from Hanskuverba about Samarsingh having imprisoned her in the

fort and his having taken away the trust-deed by force.

Samarsingh is at the end of his wits for he knows that, if Gandhiji were to comment on this incident in his *Young India*, he would lose his gadi. Radha Raman again comes to his rescue and says that Sheela, in view of her great friendship with Bhagavandas, can help him. Samarsingh agrees and Sheela, at the instance of Radha Raman, invites Bhagavandas, his wife and his son, Jagjiwan, to Matheran. When they come, Sheela is very happy in the company of these congenial souls.

The Maharaja, however, finds it very difficult to propose to a woman of Rajba's self-possession. At last, however, Rajba agrees to go out for a walk with Samarsingh by herself. She talks to the Maharaja with charming frankness which shatters the egotistic veneer with which Samarsingh's nature was covered. He tells her the story of his life for the first time with frankness. She hears it with sympathetic understanding.

The Maharaja had never met a woman in whose presence he would be inclined to lay bare his weaknesses so easily. At last the Maharaja very hesitatingly ventured to place before her the request that she should forget the past and accept his offer of marriage. He loves her, he says, beyond everything.

To this request, Rajba has an extraordinary answer. She expresses gratitude for the offer. The Maharani, however, cannot be denied her rightful place in his life; it would be sinful to build one's life on the misery of another. There is something more. Rajba has her own ideas of marriage and with these ideas if she marries him, he would be in living hell. She would marry only if three conditions are fulfilled: there should be no physical contact between them without an ever-living, sustained unity of mind, purpose and soul; their unity should be

completely independent of pomp and wealth; and lastly, both of them should dedicate themselves to the work of God.

"I will be a burden, Highness, to you," she says. "Think over all these matters for a year and if you still want me to marry you, we shall consider the matter over again. But your friend I shall always be, beholden to you for this gracious offer," Rajba concludes. The Maharaja, is chastened but, feeling happy beyond words in gaining her as a friend, takes her to his bungalow for lunch.

After lunch, Radha Raman and Jagjiwan draw up a letter to be sent to Gandhiji by Samarsingh giving his version of the Hanskuverba incident. Samarsingh is about to sign it when Rajba develops a trance, looks at Samarsingh fixedly and asks whether the document is for Gandhiji. When Samarsingh replies in the affirmative, she claims the privilege of a devoted friend to advise him not to sign the document.

Radha Raman is annoyed at the interference of Rajba, who, however, tells Samarsingh that he has to choose between herself and the lawyer.

Samarsingh accepts her advice. She thereupon tears up all the papers and dictates to Jagjiwan a letter to Gandhiji as coming from Samarsingh confessing the whole truth. In concluding the letter, which Rajba is dictating, she expresses the Maharaja's repentance at his sinful action and as an expiation, promises to return the trust monies to Hanskuverba's nephew, the Maharaja of Manigadh, to be held by him for her benefit if she goes and lives in Manigadh. The letter also conveys the assurance of the Maharaja of his genuine change of heart by telling Gandhiji that he has begged the forgiveness of Col. Pratap Singh's daughter, Rajba, for having broken his promise of betrothal to her and that she has forgiven him;

further he has pledged himself not to take another wife during the lifetime of the Maharani.

Everyone there is shocked at the blunt and frank confession which Rajba is dictating to Jagjiwan as a letter to be conveyed to Gandhiji. Radha Raman is bitter. He tells Samarsingh that he would be a fool if he signs such a mad letter and that no sooner Gandhiji receives the letter, he would lose his *gadi*.

Rajba, without looking at Radha Raman, turns to the Maharaja and tells him: "Highness, if that event happens and you lose your *gadi*, I shall stand by your side and accept your offer of marriage."

Everybody is struck dumb and the Maharaja, under the ennobling influence of Rajba, takes his pen and signs the letter.

* * *

In due course, Radha Raman and Sheela return to Bombay and resume their usual life. Udaya, Rajba and Majiba also return to Bombay, where they stay together. Ravi is a frequent visitor to Udaya's house, where he is treated with great kindness by everyone.

After Ravi has a glimpse of his old friends, Udaya and Sheela at Matheran after many years, his heart continues to be stirred by the memory of Sheela's kindness to him, the luxury in which she lives and Udaya's happy relations with his mother, brother and sister. Somehow, Marx's doctrines and the endless intrigues for staging labour strikes, which have been his main occupation, look to him hollow substitutes for beauty and love, which he had been taught to scorn.

One day Ravi is called by the Politburo of his Party, of which his old patron Sanyal is still the head, and is instructed to go to Bardoli Gandhi and Patel, they

said, were trying to organise a campaign of civil disobedience in the Bardoli taluka against enhanced land revenue. The movement, they were sure, was bound to fail and would give the Communist Party a chance to stage a violent agrarian revolution. Ravi, being the most trusted Gujarati worker in the Party, should, under some pretext, join the Congress group in Bombay and play the Trojan Horse so far as the Bardoli movement was concerned.

Ravi accepts the mission, shaves off his beard, buys Khadi clothes, drops his party name of Ravi Chudgar and assumes his old name, Ravi Shankar Tripathi. He then contacts his old teacher, Bhagavandas who is now an influential member of the Congress in Bombay and through him, his son Jagjiwan, who, as one of the trusted secretaries of Gandhiji, is in Bombay on behalf of Vallabhbhai Patel to organise support for the proposed civil disobedience in Bardoli.

Bhagavandas and Jagjiwan enlist the support of Sheela for the cause and with her assistance ultimately induce Udaya to undertake public relations work in Bombay for it. Udaya could not forego the pleasure of working together with Sheela.

At a meeting of the Congress workers in Bombay, the President of the Congress Committee disapproves of civil disobedience altogether but leaves it to Bhagavandas and others to organise public relations in Bombay. At the meeting, however, Ravi delivers one of his passionate speeches, which creates a great impression and he later accepts the offer of being a secretary to Udaya in his public relations work.

Ravi, having renewed his contacts with Udaya and Bhagavandas, goes to Bardoli, sees the camps organised by Vallabhbhai Patel and is astounded to see the spontaneous enthusiasm of the agriculturists and the inspiring

manner in which Patel moves the masses. He compares the conspiratorial methods of the Communist Party with the open and fearless manner in which the civil disobedience movement is organised; and he feels that real power lies in the fearlessness of the people. A doubt also enters his mind whether the method of the C.P.I. is suited to the Indian temperament.

Returning to Bombay, he discusses with Comrade Mona, now living as his wife, the merits of the methods adopted by Patel in Bardoli. The doubts which he feels about the Communist technique sends the fanatic Mona into a temper. She is very angry that Ravi should ever doubt the facts that Russia was not the Fatherland, that class hatred was not the proper way to secure freedom, that a violent revolution was not likely to succeed in India, that Gandhi was anything but an imperialist stooge. While discussing the differences in their outlook, they quarrel. Mona emphasizes the slogans of Marxism; Ravi tries to recapture his old faith in Mother India and her ancient culture and cannot help referring to the untranslatability of Communism in terms of Indian life.

When Ravi finds the next morning that Mona has left for the office, he follows her there. Mona tells him bluntly that she had long felt that Ravi had no faith in Communism while she is pledged to it for life, and according to their old understanding, they should now part. She also tells him that he is not fit to be a Communist and she would report to the Politburo and have him removed from the membership of the Party. Curiously enough, Ravi feels relieved though he looks back with a certain fondness on his personal association with Mona.

Having joined Bhagavandas' group of Gandhians, Ravi changes the whole mode of his life and adopts the

way in which Jagjiwan lives. He also begins to spin regularly and read the *Bhagavad Gita*, as Jagjiwan does. He is impatient to rise in the new hierarchy and decides to play the *pucca* Gandhian by insisting on working as Udaya's secretary without remuneration. He feels that he could only acquire power over everyone if he is economically independent and resolves to earn a meagre livelihood by free lance journalism.

* * *

Udaya and Sheela now find some happiness in working together for the cause of Bardoli. They go to leading men in Bombay, to merchants, to members of the Legislative Council, and try to secure support for Patel who has started the civil disobedience movement. They also go to Poona where the Government and the Legislative Council had moved for the monsoon season. The members of the Government, however, are unyielding towards the demands of the Bardoli peasants. The Governor looks with high disfavour on the civil disobedience movement. The members of the Council are also afraid as to what would happen to Bardoli if Patel insists on carrying on with the movement, and the Government decides to call in the aid of the military.

In all the discussions, Sheela and Udaya stand for the pledge taken by the Bardoli peasants not to pay the enhanced revenue. This irritates not a few of the members of the Government and Sir Sadiq, a leading member of the Government, tries to persuade Sheela to give up her unyielding stand. He also tries to tempt Udaya with the prospect of a High Court Judgeship. But both refuse to compromise their stand that the pledge of the Bardoli peasants must be respected.

Barrister Radha Raman was aspiring for a member-

ship of the Executive Council and Sir Sadiq employs his confidential man, Yashodhar, to induce Radha Raman to persuade his wife to give up her unyielding stand. He also invites his friend, the Maharaja of Premkot, to come to Bombay and induce Udaya, whose sister, it was said, had caught the fancy of the Maharaja, to part company with the Bardoli movement.

* * *

The Maharani of Premkot is a chip of the old Rajput block. She had suspected that her husband was carrying on with Udaya's sister, Rajba. On enquiry, however, she found that the relations were perfectly straightforward so far. But she sensed the great influence which Rajba exercised over her husband when he gave up pomp for simplicity and lavish parties and hunts for looking after his people. She, however, came to the conclusion that Rajba must be a clever woman who wanted to marry the Maharaja and supersede her. The Maharani, when asked to accompany the Maharaja to Bombay, gets her guru to give her some grains of rice which, by incantation, would be made effective to kill a person.

When the Maharaja and Maharani come to Bombay, they invite Udaya and Rajba for tea at the Taj Mahal Hotel. The Maharaja tries to persuade Udaya to give up the cause of Bardoli. But Udaya would not; he had pledged his word and, though he is not interested in politics, would keep it. When tea is served, the Maharani takes out the magic grains of rice from her pocket to put them into the tea cup of Rajba. However, Rajba suddenly falls into a sort of trance, as usual with her, her eyes see something which others cannot and in a sort of dream, she mutters. "Someone is trying to poison the other" The Maharaja, who held Rajba in the highest respect, suspects

what the Maharanı is trying to do and as soon as the grains of rice fell from her hand, he covers them with his elbow.

After Udaya and Rajba leave, the Maharaja upbraids the Maharanı for trying to poison Rajba, reminding her of the latter's nobility in rejecting every offer of marriage that he had made. Rajba, he says, is his saviour, his guru

* * *

Sir Sadiq's emissary, Yashodhar, is up to his tricks. Once when Radha Raman is punch drunk, he tells him that the Governor had decided not to offer him the membership of the Executive Council as his wife Sheela had, as Patel's stooge, encouraged the members of the legislature to stand by the civil disobedience movement in Bardoli. Radha Raman, in his drunken state, grows furious and later, at home, when he sees his wife Sheela coming in with Udaya, grows uncontrollable, blames her for ruining his life by her squeamishness and his career by associating with 'Gandhi-topis'. He asks her to leave his house. Udaya takes away the heartbroken, angry Sheela to his house.

Ravi, in the meantime, has come into possession of a chapter written by Udaya for the new edition of his novel, *Tapasvini* from the papers of Sheela. He thinks it is a love letter written by Udaya to Sheela. He sees in this a possibility of eliminating Udaya from the Bardoli hierarchy and becoming second in command to Jagjiwan. He telephones to Yashodhar, as though in indignation, upbraids him for creating trouble between Radha Raman and Sheela and informs him incidentally that Sheela has been driven out of his house by Radha Raman and she has gone to live with Udaya.

Next day, Udaya and Sheela, though they feel as if they are hunted by society for no fault of theirs, go to Poona to keep an engagement with the legislators who are going to decide what attitude to take on the Bardoli agitation. Ravi is in a way sorry for their unhappiness but however he is grateful that he is sure of going a step forward in the Gandhian hierarchy.

Then events happen in quick succession. At Kirkee, Udaya and Sheela are met by a friendly legislator who advises them to get down there and not to proceed to Poona. They are then told that Yashodhar had circulated the news among the members of the legislature and the Government that Radha Raman has driven Sheela out of his house on account of her intimacy with Udaya and that she has gone to live with the latter. The friend therefore advises them not to come to Poona where their presence would undermine the prestige of Bardoli.

Udaya and Sheela, unable to face the calumny, return to Bombay by car. Ravi offers to go to Poona as their agent but when there, in fact, he claims to speak on behalf of Jagjiwan and Vallabhbhai himself. Udaya and Sheela come home to Bombay, determined to leave the world which has treated them so scurvily. Rajba however is full of faith and tells them not to lose faith in God and in her prayers, once again calls upon Him to take her as a vicarious offering for her brother and save him.

While Udaya and Sheela are planning to go into some wilderness, where they can live unknown to the world, Radha Raman comes there the worse for drink, unsteady on his legs. He is now in a lachrymose frame of mind and calls upon Sheela to return to him. Sheela, he says, has ruined his domestic life because of the fastidious way in which she looks upon his friendship with other women, she has also ruined his political career. But he has now realised

that if she is not with him, he cannot restrain his weakness for women and wine, he goes to pieces and is not able to practise nor can he lead a respectable life. She must return to him, for without her he will be a wreck. He appeals, whines, sheds tears, and asks her to go with him on a long trip to Europe. Sheela, her self-respect wounded beyond repair, refuses to go with him. He leaves cursing her.

Rajba returns from her meditation, full of confidence. She assures Udaya and Sheela that she has faith that God will not forsake them. Udaya is in despair and confesses that he has no faith left in any one.

Suddenly, the telephone rings, Jagjiwan is talking from Surat Patel wants Udaya to come to Surat the next day. It is the last day of registering nominations for the vacancy in North Surat Constituency for the Bombay Legislative Council and Patel wants him to stand for it. Udaya, knowing the social disgrace which he is facing, declines the offer. Jagjiwan says that it is Sardar's wish, wants him to think it over and give him a reply a little later

Rajba's faith is redeemed. "Brother, didn't I tell you that God would not forsake you He has come to your help. Accept the offer," she says

"I can't, I can't. Sardar does not know that I dare not show my face to the world. No! I and Sheela are the hunted of the world; we must fly away"

Suddenly Rajba's faith proves contagious and Sheela, her heart steeled against all weakness, declares her fateful decision Whatever the wretchedness, whatever the loss of self-respect, she will go back to her husband That is the only way to save Udaya from social disgrace and let him take the God-given opportunity to recapture life Udaya's protestations are of no avail.

Rajba takes the situation in hand and when Jagjiwan telephones again, she tells him that Udaya has accepted Sardar's offer and that he will come to Surat by the mid-day train. Udaya, overwhelmed by the events, looks on helplessly as Sheela, with a loving look of farewell, leaves the house, immolating all her finer sensibility at the altar of her love for Udaya.

* * *

Next day, Ravi returns to Bombay exulting in his new-found importance when his card-castle topples down as he learns that Udaya will be returned uncontested to the Council and that he is now the confidant of Sardar. All his ingenuity and skill has taken him no further on his anticipated march to power.

Udaya is now a member of the Council and takes a hand in the negotiations which bring succour and victory to the Bardoli peasants. He helps the leading Counsel to fight the peasants' cause before the Committee of Enquiry. Even for a moment he could not forget the plight in which Sheela would be placed hour after hour in Europe in the company of Radha Raman who is now dragging her through the countries of Europe as a slave. Udaya cannot get sleep at night; to escape the sense of misery, he works all his waking hours; with every breath, he sighs for his Tapasvini. His mind collapses and while speaking in the Legislature, he speaks incoherently and falls to the ground in a swoon.

Udaya develops serious mental trouble, is unconscious for several days and loses his memory. When his memory comes back slowly, he finds himself in a hospital, his sister Rajba nursing him, praying for him, giving him every solace. Ravi, sobered by the setback he has received, is also in attendance and is unable to resist the magic of the

affection which Rajba and her family have been weaving round him.

Rajba by her attention and love brings Udaya back to life. Then under medical advice, he leaves for Switzerland for recouping his health.

Udaya first goes to Rome, then to Lake Como in Switzerland. His health is restored and his mind comes back to normalcy and the magic of the Swiss lakes is on him as he goes to live in an old world village on the margin of Lake Como.

A few days later, he returns to Como to collect his post when he thinks he sees Sheela standing on the jetty. He feels that the old morbidity has returned and he is going to face another mental collapse. But it is not a phantom but Sheela herself, rather a ghost of herself, in whose affrighted looks comes a glow of delight on seeing him. He has no courage to ask her how she happens to be at Como without her husband lest the look of misery should replace the joyous smile on her face. She has no particular programme and Udaya induces her to accompany him to the old world village which, in his eyes, is now a paradise on earth.

In a few days, they forget the miseries of the past and enjoy life as two little children on a picnic would do. Sheela then unburdens herself. She has been accompanying Radha Raman to the gay capitals of Europe, he invariably carrying by turns some woman of easy morals with him, drinking morning and night; she, in shame and mortification, crying out in the solitude of the bedroom, while bearing in the best way she can, the jibes of Radha Raman. Ultimately, she could bear the torture no longer and has come to Milan for a little rest.

Udaya does his best to see that her wounds are healed and forgetting the past and ignoring the future, they are

happy. But in a few days, a letter arrives for Sheela from Radha Raman. He begs of her to return; he cannot live without her; if she is not with him, he has to keep drinking the whole day; without her, he cannot maintain even the little self-control he possessed.

Sheela cannot forgive herself. She actually feels that she is responsible for her husband's plight; her squeamishness has sent him into the arms of other women, her trying to serve Bardoli has lost him his career, and driven him to constant drinking. In spite of Udaya's appeals, she leaves for Milan, unable to abandon her husband in his wretched helplessness.

Sheela leaves by the morning steamer. Udaya is thoroughly upset. He wanders about in the woods in despair and misery, cursing his fate, at the prospect of life-long frustration facing him. He falls asleep in the woods, but when he returns to the hotel, he receives a telegram from Sheela that she is coming back again.

Happy over the news, Udaya rushes to the jetty to receive Sheela, who returns crushed, stricken with a haunted look, a walking corpse of the woman who had left that very morning. Udaya senses that something terrible has happened and suppressing his burning inquisitiveness, tries to bring solace to her by offering her devotion and silent service.

But at night, as Udaya stands in the balcony of his bed-room, he hears Sheela crying piteously in the solitude of her bed-room which adjoins his. He could not resist his impulse and goes into her room, where she is lying helplessly in bed, her breaking heart finding expression in anguished sobs.

For a long time Udaya sits on her bed, his arm enclosing her with the warmth of his love and devotion. Then she becomes quiet and, in spite of Udaya's protests,

insists on drinking the dregs of her humiliation by narrating the events of the day.

Sheela is received by Radha Raman at the Milan station. Then they go into a restaurant, where he, as usual, drinks plentifully. To his queries as to where she had been, she mentions the village but makes no reference to Udaya. But she opens her bag to take out something; Radha Raman helps her to find it and discovers the paper on which Udaya had written the time for the steamer and train to Milan. Sheela then admits to having been with Udaya.

This drives Radha Raman to a drunken outburst, charging her with being the mistress of Udaya all the time. The long suffering Sheela cannot bear the foul accusation but taking compassion on the drunken husband who has sunk so low in vice and drink, she begs him not to make wild charges. But in a frenzy, he abuses her and forces her to go back to Udaya.

"Never, never will I go back to him," she tells Udaya, who tries to soothe her by loving service. He treats her as if she is a queen and he is her bounden slave and makes her happy. They begin their travels through Switzerland, and stay at Interlaken for a day.

Then, when she is recovered in body and spirit, Udaya discloses to her his project of their living as social outlaws but together, happy with each other, away from the world which has treated them so shabbily. She is too distressed even to agree, but acquiesces in the suggestion.

Next day Udaya receives a letter from Radha Raman from Paris. He has a heart stroke and is dying, and begs forgiveness of Udaya for the way he has attributed baseness to him, and urges him in piteous terms to exercise his good offices with Sheela to let bygones be bygones and to send her back to him. He will not be able to

survive, Radha Raman says, if she is not by his side to look after him.

In anger, Udaya abuses the wily man, who holds their lives in bondage. He decides to destroy the letter but cannot; his conscience stings him for doing such a dishonourable thing. He also feels that if Radha Raman were to die and Sheela come to know that he had wanted her in his last moments and that Udaya had prevented her from going to him, she would never forgive him. Ultimately, Udaya gives the letter to Sheela. She feels exactly as he had expected, gets into a temper, charges him with betrayal and cowardice and decides to leave for Paris.

But as she leaves the room, Sheela realises what has happened. Radha Raman, like the King in *Tapasvini*, has killed them both with one stroke.

Volume III

When Udaya left for Europe, the members of his family and his friends had come to see him off. Among them was Rowjee Sheth, a businessman of immense wealth, who was the Bombay agent of the Maharaja of Premkot and consequently was very friendly with Udaya's family. He was ostentatiously religious, and quoted *Bhagavata* whenever he could do so.

When leaving the pier, Rowji Sheth asks Ravi to accompany him, compliments him on his extraordinary ability and offers him employment on a high salary as his secretary. Ravi immediately sees that the astute businessman wants to get him to do difficult things for him. He has his own ambition of acquiring power and offers to serve Rowjibhai as his confidential secretary, but without taking any salary.

Before Udaya left, it was arranged with Bhagavandas that Ravi should be employed in the Khadi Niketan as a

worker. Rowji Sheth was one of its directors and so it is easily arranged that Ravi should act as the honorary confidential secretary of the Sheth.

The Sheth then tells Ravi about his difficulties. The dowager Maharani of Manigadh lived with the Maharaja of Premkot for a long time, though they were now on hostile terms. Hanskuvar was now coming to Bombay for the medical examination of her mother and had written to Rowji Sheth to arrange for her stay. Sheth, however, being the confidential man of the Maharaja of Premkot, could not openly help Hanskuvar, nor would he like to disregard her wishes. He, therefore, suggests that Ravi, as his confidential secretary, should receive Hanskuvar and look after her comforts for which the Sheth had made every arrangement.

Ravi receives Hanskuvar and her mother, houses them in a special flat which has been rented by Rowji Sheth. However, he soon finds that Rowji Sheth has become very fond of Hanskuvar and invariably goes to her at night before going home. Anyway, he thinks he is acquiring hold over Rowji Sheth which would surely be useful to him.

Often during those days, Ravi is inclined to visit Rajba, but resists the temptation. One day, the car which has been placed at the disposal of Hanskuvar comes to fetch him very early in the morning: Hanskuvar wants him immediately. He leaves for Chowpatty where he unexpectedly meets Rajba who is having her usual morning walk. He greets her; she is very cordial as usual. He is on the point of leaving her on the excuse that he was wanted immediately by Hanskuvar when Rajba in her psychic way goes into a dreamy state and invites him to accompany her. He keeps her company for about half an hour.

When he goes to Hanskuvar's house, he finds her shouting from the balcony that her mother's clothes have caught fire. Ravi rushes upstairs to find that her mother is as good as dead; she has been severely burnt, her sari having caught fire in the stove. Ravi has a suspicion that the mother's sari caught fire long before his arrival and Hanskuvar is only making a scene for his benefit. He also finds one of the handkerchiefs of Rowji Sheth lying on the ground.

Anyway, Ravi busies himself in calling the police and the ambulance and having the lady taken to a hospital. But he is surprised to learn that during the whole of that day Rowji Sheth had been out of Bombay though he feels sure that he was present when Basaheb received burns in the early morning.

When the Sheth returns in the evening, Ravi reports the whole episode to him. Rowji offers him notes of Rs 10,000 as a present which Ravi rejects and quietly hands back the handkerchief which he had found in Hanskuvar's flat. Rowji is now completely under his thumb.

Ravi is so disgusted with the foul atmosphere which Hanskuvar's matricide has created that he wants to breathe the purer atmosphere which surrounds Rajba. He, therefore, goes to her. She receives him with cordial affection. There he also takes part in a discussion on poets and poetry which Bhagavandas, Jagjiwan and the poet Matta Mayur are having with Rajba. Suddenly Ravi feels transported into a different world. He feels as if Rajba is expecting him to say something and thoughts which never came to him before suddenly spring in him. He speaks on the inalienable right of poets to express beauty, regardless of religious, or social conventions. He is surprised at the views which flow from his lips, almost involuntarily, and cannot shake off the impression

that in some mysterious way, Rajba is coming to 'possess' him

The discussion on poets is interrupted by the arrival of Hanskuvar who, affecting great distress, has come to stay with Majiba, as she cannot stay in the haunted house where her mother had been burnt almost to death, nor can she stay in the hospital. Rajba is stern and uncompromising. Hanskuvar has no place in their house and coolly asks her to go back to Manigadh and live like a proper dowager Maharani. Hanskuvar is furious at what she considers an insulting suggestion. Ravi finds a solution by taking Hanskuvar to the guest-house in Rowji Sheth's bungalow.

* * *

Ravi has high ambitions of being introduced to Gandhiji's Ashram at Sabarmati by Bhagavandas. He sees now that, with the Gandhian way that he had adopted, he could easily attach himself to Gandhiji and gain power. He, therefore, goes to Sabarmati Ashram and with his uncanny shrewdness, analyses the crowd that surrounds Gandhiji and finds that real power is concentrated in Gandhiji himself which none can share or exploit.

Though very much impressed by Gandhiji, he somehow feels that his impatience for power will not be satisfied by attaching himself to Gandhiji. But he comes to know that Gandhiji is thinking of a mass civil disobedience movement after the expiry of one year's period on December 1929 fixed by the Calcutta Congress for the British Government to concede Dominion Status to India. In this, Ravi sees tremendous prospects of gaining power and he places himself at Bhagavandas's disposal in his effort at capturing power in the Bombay Provincial Congress Committee and preparing for the civil disobedience movement. He also goes to the Lahore Congress of 1929

and feels that there will be a great opening for his ambition in the coming movement.

Ravi visits Rajba almost every day Majiba and Karan treat him with great affection which, though he distrusts it, cannot be shaken off. He also feels that when he goes there, something happens to him; he feels purer and nobler because of the inspiration which Rajba gives him.

Ravi tells her of his hopes of taking part in the coming civil disobedience movement. Rajba, who holds Gandhiji in great reverence, does not feel interested in the movement which she thinks is going to be a maelstrom of petty ambitions and jealousies, but she has a knack of getting everyone to fulfil his aspirations in his own way, and encourages Ravi to fulfil himself by plunging headlong in the movement.

* * *

Bhim, the younger brother of Udaya, arrives in Bombay from England unexpectedly. He throws the whole house in confusion, lifts Rajba off her feet in a giant embrace, lifts Karan on his shoulders and says the most scandalous things to his mother.

He was a cadet in the Sandhurst Military School in England and expected to get his lieutenantship very shortly, but Majiba kept him, as he says, so short of funds that out of desperation he was driven into making love to all sorts of girls, among them the Colonel's daughter. This got him into serious trouble and he left the College. Now that he is the darling of his mother, he says, he is going to live with her ever afterwards.

Bhim has the most unconventional habits which upset the well-regulated house. But he is quite lovable and his tall stories are so funny that everybody becomes fond of him including Godavari, the maid-servant whom Rajba has

rescued from Matheran, and her illegitimate son, Krishna.

Ravi is busy recruiting volunteers for the coming movement and introduces Bhim to some ustads of akhadas (gymnasia), who take very kindly to him.

One day Bhim comes to Khadi Niketan, takes Ravi for a walk on Chowpatty and in solemn tones, which he rarely assumes, tells Ravi that his sister Rajba is the most wonderful woman on earth; that in Bhim's absence, Ravi must look after her. He assures Ravi that Rajba loves him and he should marry her.

Ravi looks upto Rajba almost as a goddess and has no intention of being burdened with a wife and remonstrates at the suggestion.

Bhim shouts at him, calls him a fool and says, "If you do not look after my sister, I will murder you," and leaves him abruptly.

That night the house is shocked to discover that Bhim and Godavari have disappeared. Someone comes with a message that they have married and have gone away to her place and they will take away Krishna later. When Majiba, with her pride of lineage, hears that her son has married the maid-servant with an illegitimate child, she receives a shock and faints. Rajba alone is self-composed. This is the right thing which Bhim has done, she says to Ravi. It will be his making; he was always neglected in the family; there was no one in the wide world to respect him; but now in Godavari he has found someone who will worship him, and he will be happy

* * *

Udaya returns in good health, but a sad, frustrated man. He is soon cheered up by the tender care with which Rajba surrounds him. Rajba is also now looking after Majiba who, under a stroke of paralysis, is unable to move, and the affectionate Karan who dotes upon her.

Udaya impresses upon Rajba the necessity of marriage. Her stand is the same as ever : "When I find a fitting husband I will marry. But till then I am quite happy looking after you, mother, Karan and my friends. She has no complaint; I have no dissatisfaction. My studies and my yogic practices are quite enough in themselves."

In the meantime news is received that Radha Raman and Sheela are returning to India. Udaya, Rajba and others go to receive them on the pier. Radha Raman, pale and emaciated, with bulging eyes glowing with an unnatural lustre, is brought in a wheeled chair, half his face distorted out of shape by paralysis. Sheela is with him, looking to his every need, an embodiment of tragic unhappiness.

Behind Radha Raman's sunken frame and unnatural glowing eyes however is the cunning brain that watches every look of Sheela and Udaya to discover whether they exchange any significant glances. He does not let Sheela go out of his sight, and yet he requests Udaya to accompany them in his car, more to watch the misery of the two lovers than to enjoy their company.

Sheela hesitates for long whether she should go and inquire about Majiba's health or not. She, however, could not resist the temptation of seeing Udaya alone even for a moment. But Radha Raman is unrelenting; he sends his confidential man, Ranchhodji, with her. Sheela, who feels like a slave chained to Radha Raman, smarts under the humiliation of being accompanied by her husband's spy.

When Sheela goes to Udaya's house, she meets Majiba, and Rajba sees to it that her brother is left alone with her. Both of them have scarcely exchanged a word since that unhappy moment in Interlacken and in a choking voice, both simultaneously ask forgiveness of each other. But before they utter another word,

Hanskuvar comes to find them alone and takes note of the fact that they are both evidently moved.

Sheela takes leave of Udaya, and Hanskuvar then begs of Udaya to make an affidavit stating on oath that he had attested the trust deed executed by Capt. Samar Singh, now the Maharaja of Premkot. She says that if he makes such an affidavit, she would approach the Governor-General, who would compel the Maharaja of Premkot to give her the money. Udaya is disgusted with the whole affair and declines to oblige her.

Ravi who is present in the house all the time, sees the self-restraint of both Udaya and Sheela and guesses the secret, their wretchedness and despair. Suddenly Ravi's conscience is pricked. He remembers how he found what he thought was a love letter from Udaya to Sheela among Sheela's papers, two years ago; how he stole it and how, relying upon that as evidence of their intimacy, he exploited Yashodar's sneaking desire to ruin Udaya to satisfy his own lust for power. He sees how noble and tragic Udaya and Sheela are in their self-imposed restraint, in spite of the ardent love which speaks so eloquently in their eyes.

By constant contact with Rajba, Ravi has developed a split personality, in one of which he tries to conform to Rajba's picture of him as a noble and heroic person ready to die for great causes. He decides therefore to expiate for his sin, goes home and finds out that that chapter of *Tapasvini* which he thought was a love letter, and posts it without mentioning his name to Sheela.

The registered letter arrives in Radha Raman's house and is received from the postman by Ranchhodji whom his master has employed to spy on Sheela. He hands over the registered letter to Sheela, who is surprised to find in it the old chapter of *Tapasvini* which Udaya had given her

some years ago and which she thought she had misplaced. She does not understand who could have sent it back. But it is a precious document given during the first flush of their friendship and she puts it in her cabinet.

A few days later, she is shocked to find that the letter had disappeared again from her cabinet. She cannot imagine who could have stolen the letter. She is still more surprised to find the letter back again in her cabinet after a few days. Examining it closely, she finds that it has been photographed. She has no doubt in her mind that it is Ranchhodji's doing at the instance of her husband.

* * *

Gandhiji had declared his intention to start Salt *satyagraha* and fixed the date for marching to Dandi for offering it. Ravi is busy morning and night making preparations for the *satyagraha* in Bombay. He had invited Bhim and Godavari back to Bombay, and Bhim is now the captain of the Congress volunteers, Godavari taking her share with Desh Sevikas.

Gandhiji breaks the salt law. The next day, the Congress Committee officials follow suit. Bhagavandas, Jagjiwan and one or two Gandhians are arrested and sent to jail. Then are left men to whom the police would not give any importance by arresting.

Bombay is now in the throes of a bloodless revolution. Every house is a Congress house, flying the Congress flag. Men and women in their thousands throng the Congress House ready to carry out the behests of the Congress. A staunch band of young men start 'Bhoi Patrikas,' i.e. Congress news written in chunam on the main roads. They also issue a bulletin giving Congress news, reaching thousands of people. But this ferment cannot last long, so think the organisers, unless the Government could be induced to arrest some more leaders.

Ravi and his friends approach Rajba so that she should induce Udaya to join the movement. Udaya declines the honour. He had bitter experience of the way he had been treated in politics. He has not been able to reconcile himself to *satyagraha* and his sole ambition in life is to practise law and pursue literary activities. But Rajba enters into the spirit of Ravi and his friends. She tries to persuade Udaya. She talks of the freedom of the country. She also appeals to him that *tapas* is higher and nobler than following the easy path of law and literature.

Rajba, while talking to him, comes into one of her mystic veins, she develops her psychic mood and Udaya sees standing in front of him, as if in flesh and blood, the great Veda Vyasa, giving him the mandate. *There is no self-fulfilment without tapas.* Udaya bows his head and accepts the mandate.

Sheela hears that Udaya has joined the Congress and is going to offer *satyagraha*. Sick at heart, afraid of what use her husband would make of the stolen chapter, she goes to Chowpatty to hear Udaya addressing a Congress meeting. With tears in her eyes, she sees the beloved face and hears the voice which always echoed in her ears. Next morning, she goes to Chowpatty from where Udaya is leading a huge procession bent on breaking the salt law. She is carried away by the enthusiasm which surrounds Udaya. She garlands him as if she is a bride offering her all to her lord. She joins the procession to the Azad Maidan where Udaya manufactures salt and is arrested.

In the emotion which sweeps over the huge crowd, Sheela loses her nervousness and joins Rajba in going to the lock-up. Next day, she attends his trial, bids him goodbye when he is sentenced to rigorous imprisonment. Radha Raman or no Radha Raman, she goes to the Congress House and signs the *satyagraha* pledge. She has

been denied the comradeship of Udaya so long; in *satyagraha*, she would stand by his side. She is nominated a dictator of the B.P.C.C. and herself goes to jail.

After Udaya is arrested, the Congress starts planting national flags on Azad Maidan. Every day, the police make an attempt to prevent the volunteers from doing so. Burly sergeants try to snatch the national flag from the hands of the woman volunteers. One day, however, Godavari, who knows a little bit of gymnastics, is more than a match. She eludes the sergeant, with swift agility, she climbs the flag post and plants the national flag. She becomes the heroine of the day in Bombay.

Bhim bring his heroine to Majiba. Majiba, all paralytic, is proud of her son's martyrdom. Every day, she is in the habit of watching the processions of men, women and children parading the streets, happy at the news that the struggle for freedom is on. And when Godavari, followed by a huge crowd, breaks into her room, there is a picturesque reconciliation between the aristocratic, old Majiba and the maid-servant, the mother of an illegitimate child and now her daughter-in-law. And Bhim is happy that his wife has been now recognised by his mother.

* * *

Six months are soon gone. Sheela has come out of jail. And the day Udaya is due to arrive in Bombay, she joins the crowd which from the Kalyan Station accompanies the train in which the national hero is arriving. There is a huge procession which triumphantly carries Udaya through the city shouting slogans of victory. Sheela is by his side.

With the leaders in jail, Ravi and his friends organise themselves into a kind of shadow cabinet, go underground, keep up the enthusiasm in the city and see that someone or the other performs every two or three days the

ceremony of making salt and is garlanded into jail.

The technique of Ravi and his friends is entirely un-Gandhian. They collect money, employ paid volunteers, contrive situations in which the police would be compelled to fire or to use the lathi so as to keep up popular enthusiasm. This clever group has practically the run of the city.

When Udaya comes out of the jail, being the only public man of importance, people rush to him offering their loyalty and devotion. Ravi's group cannot tolerate this popularity. They want him to go back to jail, leaving them to run the movement, but Udaya is shocked to see that those who are running the Congress have completely departed from the Gandhian ideals; everything is being done in secret. He is, however, too popular to be ignored. He would not go to jail and eliminate himself, and Ravi's group of so-called revolutionaries finds it difficult to choke him off. He insists on Gandhian methods; they insist that those methods are out-of-date and they are now on the eve of a revolution involving violence.

Then follows a curious incident. A volunteer is reported to have been killed by the police while doing his duty. His funeral procession is staged by the Congress led by Udaya, Bhagavandas and other Gandhians who have come out of the jail, but managed by Ravi and his friends.

The police permitted the procession to go to Sona-pur. In the way, Ravi and others divert it to Chowpatty, insisting that the volunteer martyr should be cremated at Chowpatty where Lokamanya Tilak was cremated. The idea is to stage a conflict with the police which will mean shooting or lathi charge, which is sure to revive the drooping spirit in the city.

The procession however suddenly finds that it is faced

by the military and the police where the Girgaum road turns towards Chowpatty. The procession, which is about 200,000, shrinks to a few thousands, of them a few hundred women are made to squat down in front of the police and the military with the volunteer's corpse in front. Thus the procession in honour of the martyr is converted into a battle-ground.

Udaya and Bhagavandas take a strong attitude. The procession has been planned to go to Sonapur. The police had already been informed of the route and no one had the right to divert the procession and create a situation by a trick.

The little junta of revolutionaries is sitting on the fifth floor of an adjoining house. Udaya and Bhagavandas go and talk to them of Gandhiji and his open methods and they talk about revolution. Udaya tells the self-styled revolutionaries either to come down and lead the procession and to face the bullets themselves, when he and his friends would wash their hands off the affair, or, if the matter is left to him and his friends, like true Gandhians, they would confess their mistake and take back the procession by the authorised route.

The pseudo-revolutionaries will not accept the challenge. There is a complete break between Ravi's group and Udaya, and Udaya and his friends lead the procession through the permitted route to Sonapur.

This makes Udaya immensely unpopular with Ravi's group. After the Gandhi-Irwin truce is concluded and the Karachi Congress is held, Ravi's friends see to it that a canard is circulated that Udaya had all along been a spy of the British Government who had tried to defeat the Congress movement. Udaya goes to the Karachi Congress, hears the canard from various people and is sorry to have joined the crowd which knows not the decencies of

public life. The *satyagraha* movement is over. The possibilities of his and Sheela's meeting each other in *satyagraha* activities are now no longer possible. Broken-hearted, he confesses that the fates are too powerful for him; they would not let him be in peace; they would not let him serve the country; they would not let him work with Sheela in public activities. He comes back from Karachi broken and crushed.

* * *

In the meantime, Rowji Sheth and Hanskuvar have been visiting Radha Raman, whose sole occupation is to keep a watchful eye on his wife, so as to torture her, by keeping her by his side. Radha Raman has evolved the technique of showering compliments on Sheela for the way in which she is nursing him, a poor dying wreck. Sheela knows very well that these fulsome compliments are only chains wound round her to keep her tied to his bedside as a victim whose daily torture will delight the heart of the vengeful husband.

Radha Raman once proposes to her that she should exercise her influence with Udaya to get an affidavit in the interests of Hanskuvar's trust moneys. Sheela guesses that her husband is now in alliance with Hanskuvar and replies that she has no influence with Udaya.

One day a letter arrives for Sheela. It is from Kalidas Vidwan, editor of *Sanatana Yuga*. In the letter, the editor stated that Udaya, who claims to be an honest Gandhian, is a fraud, that he would not stand up to truth in the matter of Hanskuvar and would not make an affidavit required by her. Gandhians are all frauds, writes Kalidas; Udaya is the worst of them all. The editor also knows of the relations which subsist between Udaya and Sheela. He goes on to say that he has in his possession the photographic copies of a love letter addressed by Udaya to

Sheela, one of which he encloses with the letter. If Sheela cannot, therefore, expiate for her sinful intimacy with Udaya by getting Udaya to sign the affidavit in favour of Hanskuvar, the editor writes, he would be constrained to publish the love letter in his paper and expose the fraudulent and wicked Congressman which Udaya is.

Sheela is amazed at this blackmail. She does not know what to do about it. She trembles for the life and reputation of Udaya. She has no doubt that the photographic copy of that chapter has been supplied by her husband to Hanskuvar, who must have given it to the editor.

Unable to find a friend to advise her, she goes to Udaya who himself is in a grim mood on account of the disgraceful canard that has been spread about him. On seeing the letter, his dejection turns into uncontrollable anger against Kalidas. He tells Sheela with bitterness that he has been begging of her to come with him, become a social outlaw and live far away from the reach of men's pestilential breath. But she has not so far listened, and day after day, year after year, they are living in hell for no fault of theirs.

In a mood lashed into fury, Udaya takes the letter from Sheela, buys a whip and goes to Kalidas. He confronts the editor with the letter that he has written and tells him that he has come there for the sole purpose of teaching a lesson to editors who toy with the fair reputation of women. He therefore proposes to begin horse-whipping him from his room in Kandewadi right up to the Girgaum Police Station and there, having horse-whipped him to his heart's content, he will surrender to the police for being prosecuted. Kalidas trembles at the sight of this Udaya wild with rage, sees the whip in his hands and writes out a humble apology for having attempted to

besmirch the fair reputation of a woman. He also hands over the photographic copies of that chapter which Radha Raman had given him.

Radharaman already knows what sort of a letter Kalidas had written to Sheela. His object in thus treating his wife is to make a show of helping her out of a difficulty and thus keep her a trembling slave by his side. He therefore calls her and in soothing words assures her that, whatever happens, he would always stand by her. People in the town are talking about her friendship with Udaya, but she need not worry as he is always there to protect her. He knows that Kalidas has written such a wicked letter, but he is going to pay any amount of hush money to keep Kalidas quiet.

While Radha Raman is trying to torture her by this show of solicitous concern for her, Udaya arrives. He now has lost all patience. He tells Radha Raman that he need not worry about Sheela, that he has already got an apology and the photographic copies of the chapter from Kalidas and that his services are entirely unwanted.

Radha Raman is wild with rage when he sees that his well-laid plans have gone awry and has a mild attack of the heart. Udaya and Sheela go out and they both decide that whatever happens, they will leave the world which has treated them so badly.

After a short while, Radha Raman calls them back into his sick room, and with sardonic delight, says that he has now made a codicil which he would like to read to them both. The codicil reads that Sheela has tortured him throughout life; that he has returned the compliment by torturing her to the best of his ability; that now all that he leaves of his estate to her is one rupee in order that when he dies, she may spend that rupee for getting her saree coloured black which will suit her as a widow.

Sheela is furious and tears off the codicil. This sends Radha Raman into a malicious laughter, so forthright that his heart stops.

* * *

On return from Karachi, Ravi also is completely broken in spirit. He had worked hard to build up the movement in Bombay. He had hoped that the movement would bring about a revolution out of which he would emerge as a centre of power. He and his friends had anticipated that Gandhiji's days were over. All these expectations have been belied. Gandhiji has emerged more powerful than before. The old guard of the Congress has taken charge. He and his friends are no better than insignificant volunteers who had acted well, but not wisely, in departing from the Gandhian technique.

But more than that, he feels that he has lost grace with Rajba. All this time, though disagreeing with his ways and methods, she had, in her characteristic way, given him encouragement to fulfil himself by following the bent of his own mind. He had not taken part in spreading the rumour that Udaya was a British spy, but he knew that they were doing their best to harm Udaya and he had not raised his voice in protest nor parted company with them.

With his guilty conscience, Ravi has not even the courage to meet Rajba, but he knows that unless he goes and frankly confesses all to her, he would feel unhappy. He therefore goes to her, begs her forgiveness for what he had done.

With a smile like that of an indulgent mother, Rajba makes him feel that she knows all about the streak of wickedness that he possesses, and in spite of that she is prepared to help him to be true to himself. He had been afraid that she would drive him out of her

presence. But when by tone and look, she forgives him, he feels how wicked his nature is and how but for her, his lust for power would drive him to ignominious ways. This confession, to some extent, purges him of grossness and he swears to himself that he would be worthy of Rajba in the future.

Gandhiji goes to attend the Round Table Conference, returns and is arrested. In a few days, all the leaders of the Congress are rounded up. Ravi wants to go underground and carry on the fight. He feels that he must fight for the country; at any rate, he must accept the challenge of the British and show to them what one man can do. He asks Rajba's permission, which she cheerfully gives. She knows that, in moments like this, Ravi's power complex must be allowed free scope in order that he might have a sense of self-fulfilment.

Ravi goes underground, establishes his old contacts, gathers volunteers, and organises resistance to British authorities in Bombay on a large scale. In hiding, sometimes he goes without bath or food for days; moves almost hourly from one hiding place to another; after midnight, however, he often comes to the house of Udaya, who is happily married to Sheela, where Rajba would be waiting for him at the rear gate. He would go to her room where she would provide bath and food, and in the early hours of the morning, he would emerge to fulfil his mission. Rajba encourages and helps him in all that he does, though she keeps aloof from the movement.

After a few months, Ravi is arrested. He is taken to Bijapur jail where he is housed in the condemned cell with six or seven other Congress leaders. There he has a sudden disillusionment. People, whom he thought were leaders, are weak persons, who quarrel over a little cup of tea, who sometimes in bitterness blame Gandhiji for not

coming to a settlement soon enough and who care more for their little comforts than for the freedom of the country. This makes Ravi angry. Then, to divert his mind, he wins the confidence of the Superintendent of the jail by his cleverness and takes charge of the ward where the political prisoners are housed. He sees their weaknesses and their strength. He also meets some seasoned criminals and sees the seamy side of life.

Though obtaining some control of jail life gives him a little satisfaction, Ravi feels disgusted with himself. All his power mania has brought him to this. And on one occasion when he tricks a very devout and honest Gandhian into giving up his fast undertaken for personal purification, he is full of disgust with himself. Ravi, in the solitude of his cell, sees the dangerous depths of his own nature. He wanted power; he was prepared to pay any price for power. He had little moral sense. Only Rajba's influence over him saved him time and again from his sordid depths.

With all self-confidence gone, Ravi's constant introspection leads him to a mood of self-disgust. Udaya had conferred every benefit on him while he in his turn had tried to ruin him, not once, but twice and thrice. He had joined Rowji Sheth in a conspiracy to save the matricide. He had never been a true Gandhian. He had become a pseudo-revolutionary to indulge in his lust for power. His grandfather had given him a great heritage and yet he had derided truth and used his knowledge of the Shastras to trick people into obedience.

This sense of utter self-disgust leads to a psychological crisis in which Ravi's mind collapses. He also finds how unworthy he is of Rajba's confidence. Even in trying to impress upon her that he is an able man, he is only being his cunning, deceptive self. He is really cheating this

noblest of woman who had given him the encouragement and strength and who had lived in the hope that some day he would fulfil her expectations of him.

In this mood, in the wakeful hours of the night, Ravi decides to get out of the jail, if necessary by offering an apology, as so many other politicals were doing. He decides that he would go out, hide himself in the Himalayas, sit at the feet of some sadhu and completely obliterate himself. Ravi is so completely demoralised that he decides to see the Superintendent of the jail in order to offer his apology and get out. He spends the whole night in wild despair, denying God, sometimes dreaming of Rajba, whom also in some moments he forswears.

In the morning before Ravi could go to the Superintendent, the Superintendent himself calls him, congratulates him and places in his hands Rajba's letter. Ravi looks at the letter. Reading a few lines, he feels as if he would fall down in a swoon.

He comes to his cell and reads the letter again. Rajba has written to him in frank terms, offering to be his wife. She has stated that their lives had been linked for a long time. In her vision she had seen him almost drowning. In meditation she had received a mandate that she was committing a sin in not realising the fact that both of them are one. Her last words are 'I hope you will come to me whenever you can, for I am waiting.'

Suddenly the mood of Ravi changes. Hope and strength return to him. He knew all along that he loved Rajba, but never expected that she would love him. Yes, she is his saviour. She has thrown a life-belt to him. He will now accept it and live for her. Suddenly all despair and disgust disappear. He sees before him the wide world in which Rajba would lead him to real power,

not the power he had conceived so far, but power over himself and power to realise real strength and beauty.

Rajba's strange call to him to come and meet her is followed by miraculous events, in which it becomes easy for Ravi to go to her. That evening, the Jamadar of the jail, whom Ravi has heavily bribed all along, comes to him and significantly tells him that he met one Dhansukh who gave him a message. 'Jani wants you.' Dhansukh, says the Jamedar, is waiting in Bijapur for a reply.

Suddenly a vista opens before Ravi. Rajba, the goddess, has chosen him as her mate and called him to her. She has saved him from the disgrace of an apology. And now providentially comes the message of Jani wanting him to come to his house.

Jani was a cherished friend of Ravi. While Ravi was conducting the civil disobedience campaign in Bombay, Jani, who had, like him, little faith in Gandhiji's methods, was organising a devout band of followers to capture one village after another in the district of Broach and get them to declare independence. In those days, Ravi had financed Jani to conduct his movement. So far, Jani had eluded arrest and was still holding on to a few liberated villages on the border of the Broach district which abutted on the territories of the Baroda State.

As if by a magic wand, Ravi's way is clear. The same evening several prisoners break the jail. There is confusion all-round and the Jamadar helps Ravi to escape from jail. Travelling on foot and buses and carts, hiding in jungles most of the day, Ravi and Dhansukh reach Bombay. Ravi informs Rajba of his arrival in Bombay by telephone and reaches Udaya's bungalow after midnight. Rajba is there waiting for him at the rear gate, her eyes glowing with love. They go to Rajba's bed-room where, as during the days of the civil disobedience, there is

a hot bath and dinner ready for him. She is no longer the inspiring goddess or a devoted friend. She behaves as if she is his wedded wife. Ravi feels happy after months of torture that he has passed through. He embraces Rajba, who clings to him with a prayerful devotion.

For the moment, Ravi's mind is aflame. Here is the young beautiful woman pledged to him; here is the solitude so cherished by lovers; here is the bed awaiting them. A strong wave of passion seizes him. The next moment, he would have lifted Rajba from the ground and laid her on the bed. Then he catches the look on Rajba's face, the significance in her eyes. She does not cling to him as a bride would; she is looking upon him as if he is a worshipful Maharshi and she but a prayerful devotee. He receives the shock of his life; he does not know what to do. He knows that the *ishta devata* in whose worship she spends days and nights is Lord Vyasa, the great Maharshi.

Ravi turns to the mirror which reflects them both but finds that his face is not reflected in the mirror. His face is that of a venerable sage whose eyes reflect the wisdom of eternity. For the moment, he gnashes his teeth. He realises for the first time that Rajba in her own way is trying to invest him with the greatness of Lord Vyasa; that to her, he is not a human lover but only the Lord to whom she has surrendered everything.

He sees clearly that throughout Rajba has been making an alchemy of faith by which he is to be transmuted into a sage such as his grandfather used to talk about. There is a flutter of fear in his heart. If he gave reins to his animal passion, a look of torture would pass over her face. The next moment she will look upon him with reproachful eyes, crushed and broken, realising that her great experiment in life has failed. It is too

terrible a prospect With reviving sense of power, he crushes his impulse and puts his hand over her head with irrepressible tenderness, muttering 'Rajba, I shall fulfil all your expectations of me.'

Ravi, in the disguise of a *sadhu*, goes to Baroda and thence to the village in the Baroda territory adjoining the Broach district. In the villages which his friend Jani controlled, he has forged a peculiar technique. It is impossible to arrest him for he would be found one day in British territory, the next day in the Baroda State territory.

Some day, he and his volunteers would unexpectedly appear in a village raising the slogan of 'Swaraj.' The villagers would all join him and surround the police station. The policemen, who fully sympathised with the people, would surrender, giving up their arms which Jani and his friends would collect and the village would be liberated from the British rule.

A few days later, a police force from the headquarters in Broach would arrive in the village, when Jani's boys would disappear into the territory of Baroda State. The villagers would take down the national flag from their roofs and the police would occupy the police station.

When the police force would leave for Broach, within a few days Jani's boys would again liberate the village.

This kind of thing had been going on for a whole year. But now the season for collecting the revenue is approaching and the Government headquarters at Broach cannot turn a blind eye to what is happening in the Jambusar Taluka.

Jani is without funds and wants Ravi to provide them from Bombay Ravi has now acquired a wider vision and a maturer wisdom. He remonstrates with Jani at pursuing an impossible programme. He tells him that there is no possibility of the movement being conducted any

longer. Any movement which deviates into violence is sure to be crushed, and would have the effect of keeping Gandhiji longer in jail. The struggle, he says, is really between one great personality, Gandhiji, who has the control of the conscience of the Indian people and the British Government Jani would not agree to it He has his plans of resisting the collection of land revenue, of preventing the large police force from coming to Jambusar and slowly of enlarging the area of his liberated villages Ravi does not like to forsake an old friend whose ardent patriotism he vastly admires But he extracts a promise from Jani that if Ravi is to help his movement, Jani would not indulge in acts of organised violence.

One day, however, when Ravi returns from Baroda with money to the village which they had fixed as their rendezvous, he discovers to his horror that Jani and his friends have gone to a railway track nearby with the object of blowing up a culvert. They had been informed that a police force was going to Jambusar by a particular train and Jani had decided to blow up the train Ravi is furious when he learns of this breach of promise, but he wants to save Jani from this catastrophe. Only a few hours are left for the train to pass the appointed place. No vehicle is available and Ravi breathlessly runs towards the place fixed for the blowing up. Breathless, tired, but determined, he is almost near the place of sabotage, when he sees a train coming over the culvert. A loud explosion, a flash of light and the dynamite has done its work. The culvert has been blown up, the engine with a few coaches has toppled over. Luckily it is a goods train.

Ravi sees some of Jani's men running away into a nearby jungle. Jani has broken his promise and indulged in violence Ravi for a moment is angry. He has half a mind to turn back, but he sees that the engine driver

and one or two men thrown out from the over-turned engine are writhing in pain. Suddenly he feels as if Rajba stands before him. He cannot run away to save his skin. He is beyond attachment, wrath and fear. She had tried to see Vyasa in him. He cannot betray him. He therefore goes and drags one or two men from under a coach and tries to take the engine driver and his men beyond the reach of the burning engine.

News of the sabotage had reached the Broach station and a party of police arrive by rail lorries. Ravi is arrested, put in a lock-up and tortured by the police for securing a confession. He, however, would not say a word. He enjoys the feeling that on his word depends the life of Jani and his several friends. This is real power over life and death. "Rajba, you have given me real power," he mutters to himself.

Udaya, Sheela and Rajba come down to Broach to help Ravi in his defence. Rajba is immensely proud of the part Ravi had played. Ravi is equally happy that he is now in a position to exercise more power than he has ever done. He reads the *Bhagavad Gita* in jail, practises whatever little yoga he knew and feels supremely indifferent to his fate.

A case of conspiracy is launched against Ravi, Jani and several of Jani's friends, some of whom have been arrested and some absconded. The case drags on month after month. Ravi would not say a word about Jani and his friends and in spite of Udaya's able defence, the Sessions court convicts Ravi and sentences him to death. For want of evidence of conspiracy, Jani and his friends are acquitted.

Ravi now feels happier than ever before. He is transferred to the Yerawada jail and housed in the Fansi Kholi, the cell for the condemned, to await the result

of the appeal to the High Court and to the Privy Council, which Udaya is prosecuting on his behalf. Ravi is calm and collected. Every fortnight Rajba comes, the loving and the loved bride who looks up to him with a faith and devotion, which gives him strength and inspiration. The High Court confirms the sentence of death on Ravi. Udaya goes up to the Privy Council which remands the case for taking further evidence ,

* * *

It is early in January of 1937, more than four years after the event. The Privy Council alters the sentence passed on Ravi to 10 years rigorous imprisonment.

Ravi is prepared for death, the death of a hero dying to save his friends, who has obtained mastery over his passions. He has been feeling that in death he would attain a power greater than what he had hankered after throughout life. That, more than anything else, he is fulfilling the expectations which Rajba has of him and now, unjustly, he would have to suffer the humiliation of incarceration for 10 long years in jail. This is not power. No judge, no law has power over him to keep him in jail for ten years. He must, he feels, dominate the situation. He must be the master of his own fate and he decides to undertake a fast unto death.

When Rajba comes to meet him next, Ravi, with complete indifference to the fear of death, tells her that he would assert his mastery over men and things, by deciding his own fate. Sheela is aghast at this decision to commit suicide. But Rajba is in frank admiration. She knows that her experiment has succeeded, that here is a man who is without attachment, fear or wrath. He is the master of his own destiny and she clings to him with the deep faith of a devotee who has surrendered her all to her Master.

Ravi undertakes the fast, defying the advice of the Superintendent of the jail. Day and night pass slowly, as the pangs of hunger affect him, as his mind begins to collapse, as all his life-long struggle for power passes before his eyes. He is tempted by the Superintendent and the warder to take food, but he throws it away. He will not even take water. He grows weak and feeble. Every night is a tedious long affair, but he is not unhappy. He is asserting his supremacy over life and death. The tortuous days pass by, night after day, hour by hour.

The Superintendent ultimately takes him to the hospital for feeding him forcibly. Ravi smiles at the childish efforts of the Superintendent, asks for pen and paper and before he is forcibly fed, writes a statement. He writes that the Superintendent, in the discharge of his duties, wants to feed him forcibly; he, however, is master of his own life and would not permit the Superintendent to interfere with it. He has therefore decided, as soon as he is forcibly fed, to give up his life and if he dies on the table, no one should blame the Superintendent, he is only doing his duty and should not be held guilty of mal-treatment in any manner.

When the Superintendent reads this last statement of Ravi, he is moved to the depth of his heart. Tears come into his eyes and he gives up his attempt to keep Ravi alive by feeding him forcibly. The Superintendent is a kind-hearted man.

* * *

The first April, 1937 has come and a new responsible government has come into power in Bombay. The Superintendent rushes to the new Home Minister to request him to give amnesty to Ravi. Ravi is taken back to the hospital ward where he has been kept separate from other patients. He knows now that his

body is fast collapsing. Very shortly his life would end. He thought of his grandfather Ganapathishankar Shastri, of his own futile efforts to gain power and the mysterious way in which Rajba made him into a different being. He tries to concentrate his mind to keep Rajba before his eyes. He is sure that if he dies, Rajba would be immensely proud of him.

Two days later when it is difficult for him even to prevent himself from going into a faint, the Superintendent comes to him with the news that the Government has remitted his sentence and that Udaya, Sheela and Rajba are coming the next day to take him home. The Superintendent is wild with joy. For a moment Ravi feels happy too. Tomorrow morning he would be released. Then he would be able to take water. Then he will be fed. Then, in the loving arms of Rajba, he will go to Bombay. Udaya and Sheela will look after him. Then he would marry Rajba, that wonderful woman who has made him what he is and he would be happy thereafter. He shakes off the creeping unconsciousness that is coming over him.

Then, lying alone in that ward, his mind begins to think what would happen day after tomorrow. He traces the whole of his life and career. He has been a man of great ability and terrific ambitions. He had wanted power by every means, fair or foul. He tried many experiments, but failed. Why? Because he wanted to secure power by managing people, not by being intrinsically powerful himself. To his horror, he realised more acutely than ever that his strength, his greatness, his supremacy over life and death, his great sacrifice for Jani and his friends, were not the result of his own will, not the outcome of his own good nature. Curiously, from the first day when he felt that, under Rajba's mysterious influence, he talked

about poetry in a way which he never felt, he had developed a personality which was in fact the creature of the terrific faith which Rajba had in him, of her uncanny psychic power of creating things which she concentrated on with absolute faith His supremacy to attachment, wrath and fear, was not his. It was a norm of conduct imposed upon him by the superior will of Rajba

As this thing becomes clear to him, he feels that if he becomes free the next day, he would be happy for a few days Rajba, in the worshipful mood of hers, would certainly marry him But then what? Would he be able to sustain for life this curious sense of spiritual power which he has developed so as to fulfil the great expectations which Rajba has of him? Today, she looks upon him as a second Vyasa, learned and wise, superior to attachment, fear and wrath But day after day, when they would live together in married life, this kind of superimposed personality would wear away Then, his old temperament would re-assert itself. Then Rajba would discover that her expectations remain unfulfilled, that he was not gold, but only tinsel Then she would not complain, but her smile would wither away. Her heart would break. She would receive a shock at her life's experiment having failed and, oh God! he would have betrayed her. Ravi shudders He must escape this fate for himself as well as for her She has created him She must always live with the feeling that her life's work had succeeded, that he had been a man of genuine power who had transcended all animal instincts.

There is but one way If he dies before amnesty arrives tomorrow and Rajba receives him, she will feel that he has died a hero's death, that her expectations of him have been fulfilled Throughout her life and the life of all associated with them, he will live as the man who had

attained the highest power by dominating life and death. The more he thinks, the more he finds the solution to be the best. He should not allow the great experiment of Rajba on which she had based her life's mission to fail. He must fulfil her expectations. He slowly repeats the *Bhagavad Gita*; he mutters the verse:

This is the Brahmic state, O Pritha's son,
When one attains it, all delusion is shed
When, dying, if it is firmly planted
One attains the Brahman

Ravi tries to rise from his bed and go to the window, but he could not so much as move from his bed. He makes a supreme effort and rises. He totters, he stumbles and yet goes forward. He goes near the window and stands there, gazing at the sky. In the northern sky are the Seven Rishis shining with unusual brilliance. They are the sages of old, but remain an unchanging power dominating the Universe. "Like them shall I remain a star in the firmament of Rajba's life," he mutters.

He cannot stand. He feels giddy, but still stands and gazes at the *Ursa Major*, holding to the bars of the window. He then releases an intense will to end his life. Rajba stands before him. Yes, divinely radiant. She is smiling. He has fulfilled her expectations.

Suddenly he feels giddy again. He cannot stand any more. Darkness falls on him, as from some subterranean cavern of his being rises a voice "Rajba, I am yours."

CHAPTER XIII

AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WORKS

A distinguished critic once averred that an autobiography must be a brief for the author and his actions or for a cause. Though Munshi has argued many people's briefs with phenomenal success in the law-courts, he has consistently refused to use the vehicle of autobiography for explaining his conduct or for justifying his actions. The result is that his autobiographical works do not pall as laboured apologetics. On the other hand, they make a direct appeal to the head and heart alike of the reader by their obvious sincerity and utter frankness. Munshi has stated the facts with complete objectivity. There is no *suggestio falsi* or *suppressio veri*, nor has he set down aught in malice.

The temptation is great to compare Munshi's autobiographical works with the Confessions of Jean Jacques Rousseau. The comparison is both just and unjust. No doubt, Rousseau was brutally frank in setting down the story of his life, but the very title gives an indication how his mind was working. Munshi has, however, no need for any confession. Moreover, he is not dissecting his past in the morbid manner of a Freudian. There is no masochistic element in Munshi's mental make-up. His only object was to set down the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. There is no attempt to influence the judgment of the reader whom he credits with sufficient intelligence to come to his own conclusions.

Munshi has written three volumes of direct autobiography, an account of a travel to the European continent and a prose-poem.

Addhe Raste (Half the Way) is a slightly misleading title for the book covers only the first twenty years of his life. The book created quite a controversy when it was published. The prudes and the conservatives charged Munshi with having delineated his ancestors with levity. The charge was wide of the mark. Munshi has ever taken pride in his ancestors. But in the book, he refused to treat them as wooden dolls or lifeless ikons. On the other hand, he treats them as vibrant human beings with their due share of human follies and foibles; and he spices his descriptions with his characteristic humour. This humour does not desert him even when referring to situations which were anything but humorous when they occurred. After his father's death, a wily neighbour filed a claim for a part of the 'Munshi Heights' where Munshi and his mother were staying. As some latrines stood on the disputed property, Munshi has described this incident as the *Jajru Purana* in this book. Throughout, the book provokes quite a few chuckles and some loud guffaws as well.

This book is valuable in another sense. Munshi gives a vivid and kaleidoscopic survey of the social conditions in Gujarat during the latter half of the nineteenth century. His descriptions of caste dinners, early marriages and enforced widowhood throw a flood of light on the fossilised society of the day. Munshi also indicates how the more progressive youth of Gujarat including himself were in revolt against these archaic evils which were eating into the very vitals of society and sapping its progress. As a record of the social evils and the pioneering efforts made by reformers, this book has a historical value.

Munshi gives a graphic description of the Ahmedabad session of the Indian National Congress (1902) over which Surendranath Banerjee presided. It was but natural that Munshi should have been carried away by the

resonant tone and the rolling periods of the great Bengali orator. Natural also that Munshi should resolve to master the art of public speaking. At the Baroda College, Munshi came under the spell of Aurobindo Ghosh and toyed for sometime with terrorism. The book traces the alternate advance and retreat of a disunited and dispirited people awakening to life.

Sidha Chadhan (The Steep Climb) takes up the story where *Addhe Raste* leaves it in 1906 and continues it to 1922. Replying to the felicitations offered to him on his sixtieth birthday, Munshi referred to this book and said: 'One of the volumes of my autobiography I have styled *The Steep Climb*. The whole of my life has been a steep climb; from a weak childhood to a tolerably good health at sixty; from an eating house costing Rs 5 a month to a comparative luxury, from complete obscurity to some recognition, from inability to frame two sentences well to about half a hundred volumes in every branch of prose.'

Sidha Chadhan is a source-book of the history of India's freedom struggle. Munshi delineates the hectic political activity that followed the formation of the Home Rule League under the inspiration of Lokamanya Tilak and Dr. Annie Besant. We get a picture of Jinnah, the Nationalist, who would not hesitate to defy Lord Willingdon and who took a leading part in thwarting the attempts of toadies to present an address to that sundried British bureaucrat. We get almost for the first time an authentic account of the inception of the *Young India* and the *Navjivan* which, under Gandhiji's editorship later, became the mouthpiece of a nation in revolt.

Munshi's humour does not desert him. We enjoy reading about the 'Mahatma' of the *Vama marga*, her amourous overtures and the strategem by which she was got rid of. The advice given by one of Munshi's relations

as how to get rid of guests who outstay their welcome is Rabelaisian.

This period is one of hectic activity for Munshi. He is making headway in his profession of law which is a jealous mistress. He is working for the Home Rule League and attending the annual sessions of the Congress. He is writing novels which give Gujarat the consciousness of its great historic past. He is the moving spirit behind the Sahitya Samsad and is editing *Gujarat*, the organ of the Romantic School of literature of which he is the leader. No wonder therefore that a breathless intensity pervades *Sidha Chadhan*.

Sidha Chadhan stops with 1922, for by that time Munshi's Steep Climb had been successfully negotiated. He is now a front rank lawyer at the Bombay Bar, his annual income passing the hundred thousand mark. He is the foremost novelist in Gujarati, sharing with the poet Nanalal the premier place among the creative literary artists of Gujarat. In the same year, Munshi meets the lady who is destined to become Lilavati Munshi.

The third volume of his autobiography differs from the first two, as the very title indicates. *Svapnasiddhi-ni Shodhma* (In Search of Dream Realization) is the story of four hectic years of suffering and sorrow, of turmoil and tears, when at long last he realizes his dream of 'Devi' sharing his hearth and home, of two souls merging into each other. Naturally therefore the book is overshadowed by a sombre undertone. The buoyant humour of Munshi is conspicuous by its absence.

Caught between 'a triangle of forces,' Munshi underwent great mental torture during these four years. People were not wanting who put the worst possible interpretation upon his relations with Lilavati which provided material for spicy scandal. As he points out in the book,

even Bhulabhai Desai indulged in ribald jokes about him But in narrating these pinpricks and describing the social ostracism to which he and Lilavati were subjected, Munshi shows an utter absence of rancour or bitterness It is as though Munshi considered these sufferings as God-sent tests to purge whatever dross there was in him Stoicism is a major keynote in his descriptions of his sufferings.

The greatest merit of this book is that the major portion of it is made up from his diary notes and the letters that he and Lilavati used to write to each other Though they were living in the same building, they used to correspond with each other daily, sometimes three letters and notes being exchanged in a day These letters reflect the passing moods of the writers, sometimes witty, at others sad, but usually with the buoyancy of hearts aflame with love He offers these letters not as constituting any justification of his conduct but as avowing his inner life. No wonder he has, at the beginning of this volume, quoted the lines of Aeschylus

‘Willingly, willingly I did it,
Never will I deny the deed.’

It is a poignant story that Munshi tells in this third volume of his autobiography ; and he tells it with tremendous power and pathos The tribute that he has paid to the three women who shaped his life is a moving piece of poetic prose. *Svapnasiddhi-ni shodhma* depicts the very heart of the author, the anguish and ecstasy of his soul

Mari Binjavabdar Kahani (My Irresponsible Story) is a narration of Munshi's trip to Europe in 1923 with Atilakshmi and Lilavati In *Svapnasiddhi-ni Shodhma*, Munshi writes. ‘Blinded by love, I thought that I could follow the precepts of the *Yogasutra* and resolve this triangle of forces by making them parallel in a way that no one had ever succeeded in doing. It was folly.’ The trip

to Europe was a unique one Munshi writes of this trip in a light and humorous vein 'In fact, the author addresses his pen and asks it to take leave of conventional respectability for the time being The early portion of the book shows the height of imagination. But by the time he reached Naples, Munshi had realised that the trip would not 'square the triangle'. The buoyant mood deserted him But his descriptions of the countries which they visited is characteristically graphic.

There remains one more book: *Shishu ane Sakhi* (The Child and his Comrade). As can be seen from the preface to the book, the piece welled forth from Munshi's inmost being quite spontaneously in a broadening stream of rhythmic prose of great beauty and power. It must have been a wonderful experience. It is a sustained vision in which scene by scene, the unfolding drama is revealed.

Shishu, the child, has dreamt of a comrade, Sakhi, who shares his life with him. But it remains only a dream; for he marries when he is too young to understand what marriage means. His wife, Sati, is a gentle uncomplaining girl, whose whole life is bound up in her husband, but unfortunately she is too ignorant to enter into or even to understand Shishu's yearnings after beauty and joy and power

At first, Sati is quite happy; she has her beloved Shishu and the love of all his family. But Shishu's soul is in revolt He cannot bear Sati near him for she is not the comrade, Sakhi, of whom he had dreamt. Always mindful of his duty, however, he is considerate to Sati. The influence of a good mother and a cultured upbringing save Shishu from the inevitable temptations.

Then Sakhi comes into his life, and Shishu at once recognises in her the loved comrade of his dreams They

both recognise with rapture that each is but a part of one whole, and that they have been travelling through a succession of births in vain search of each other. Their separation is not yet over because both are separately tied down by the sacred ties of marriage and family. But they are both poets, and in literary collaboration, they find the happiness and satisfaction which life denies them.

Sati, with intuition of a loving wife, realises immediately the mutual attraction between her husband and Sakhi. She realises too that she can never give to Shishu the inspiration and the delight of artistic and intellectual companionship which Sakhi gives him. Gentle and loving as she is, she does not grudge Shishu the happiness she herself cannot give him. The situation is intolerable but each is willing to suffer that the other two may be happy. Of the three, Shishu is the most impatient and suffers the most. But they remain the best of friends. Next comes word-pictures of a wonderful tour of Europe made by all three together. They see the beauties, natural and artistic, of the West and find much inspiration in the ideals of the Greeks and the Romans as expressed in their art and literature. After they return, life becomes hourly torture for each one of them. Shishu, borne down by physical and mental worry and distress, wants to give up the world.

After many days, Shishu and Sakhi meet alone, beside the sea. The slow-heaving waves break on the shore and in tune with the waves, so do their own thoughts and emotions as they sit silently by each other. The atmosphere grows tense with feeling. Hopes unspoken take form and shape. Their hearts begin to dance. They sit on a rock which stands in the waters behind an old ruined temple. The sky is clear; the hills beyond dark. The full moon rises, illuminating the earth, and sheds a glistening shimmer

of light on the restless waters. Beauty is everywhere and everything is beautiful, and both are wrapped in silent love of each other.

Shishu is serious. ““Sakhi,” he says, “this is the day on which we pledged ourselves to each other, years ago, on the banks of the White River. We have kept the pledge so far. But we did not know the full meaning of Love. We thought him an image of dancing joy, tender of heart. But now we know him for what he is: grave and gloomy, looking at us with tearful eyes, tortured by separation; treading with slow steps; singing the song of woe in a voice quivering with anguish.”

“Shishu” says Sakhi in reply, “Why do you say that? Love is our only hope.”

Shishu shakes his head sadly. “Sakhi, the cruel one has grown flowers of hope only that he may scorch them with the breath of despair... Death has missed none so far and will not miss us, Sakhi! Then why should I not live as one dead even in the midst of life and attain what death alone can lead me to,” he asks her and continues:

“Sakhi! I have found a beautiful spot, far, far away from the world. There, the sleepy Rewa creeps between tall crags; the hooded cobras swing to the music of wandering sadhus; the alligators, open-mouthed, longingly gaze upon the rustic charms of village beauties as they come to fetch water. There, the evening breeze brings the distant tinkle of temple-bells, echoing joyfully in men’s hearts. There, I will go and live in the company of the peaceful. There, chanting the hymn of love, I will seek liberation, your name on my lips”

Sakhi looks at her lover, bent on renunciation, the very picture of their soul, one and indivisible. “Then fill your bowl with water for two, my Shishu!” she cries. “Who else will spread the deer-skin for you, ascetic mine,

except your impatient disciple? Shishu, when you give up the world, you will be mine ''

And the moon, guardian god of lovers, as he shines in the sky smiles down upon them with age-old knowledge.

Sati, gentle and uncomplaining, passes away, loving her husband to the last. Years pass, Sakhi becomes a widow, and the way to their union is clear. They unite at last, the misery of aeons is over, the two halves meet to become one whole. Life, now, is an endless round of happiness and peace

Once more they repair to the ruined temple on the sea-shore. The spirit of a venerable sage takes shape before their eyes and claims them as his own. He lays bare to them the true significance of their lives as they are living then, lives of mere wordly pleasures seeking fame and doing what people call 'good deeds'. He tells them of the glory of sacrifice; of true success which is measured not by what one acquires but by what one gives up. He exposes the hollowness of modern life. True life, the phantom says, is Truth (Sat), Tapas and Reet. They recognise it as the call of the Great Spirit of Aryavarta (the *Bharatabhagya vidhata* of Rabindranath Tagore) and the two companions on the road of life decide there and then to obey it.

Thus ends this extraordinary work. If one can so call it, it is a stirring song in prose, full of passion and beauty, throbbing with love and tears and sacrifice.

CHAPTER XIV

MISCELLANEOUS WRITINGS

The group of Munshi's writings which remains to be considered consists of two biographies and a few volumes of essays, addresses, and articles relating to literature and aesthetics. In all these, Munshi reveals himself as a first-rate writer of vigorous prose. These works also give us valuable insight into his philosophy of life and his conception of art, beauty and literature.

Narasayyo Bhakta Harino is a biography of Narasinha Mehta, the great poet of *bhakti*. In the introductory essay, Munshi investigates the difficult question of the date of the poet. At one time his date was taken as fixed between 1414 and 1480. Munshi gives cogent arguments for placing the poet's age between 1500 and 1580. He also goes into the question of the authenticity of some of the poet's works.

The biography blazes a new trail in Gujarati literature as the poet is dramatically and psychologically recreated from his own works. An eminent Indian statesman once said that the art of critical biography cannot thrive in this country where the heart is gluttonous for flattery and the skin is extremely sensitive to criticism. Munshi proves the exception. He is not blind to the shortcomings of Narasinha Mehta. But from the book emerges a saint, devout and true, and a literary giant who broke away from the lifeless literary traditions of his days and moulded the language and sentiments of succeeding generations.

Narmad: Aravacinoman Adya is a biography of Narmadashankar Lalshankar, a very controversial literary

personality of the nineteenth century. Munshi says that Narmad was not merely a literary figure, but he was an apostle of revolt. Almost a legend during his time, Narmad became after his death a heroic tradition. Here again Munshi reconstructs the inner evolution of Narmad from his own works. He rescues Narmad from the fulsome eulogies of his apologists and the carping criticisms of his enemies and he presents him as the father of modern Gujarati prose who found it a feeble vehicle of expression and left it a language of great promise.

Gujarat-ni Asmita is a collection of Munshi's speeches and writings on the cultural unity of Gujarat. This collection was sponsored by a Special Committee of the Gujarat Sahitya Parishad which, at its Karachi session, congratulated Munshi on attaining his fiftieth year and thanked him for his services in rousing Gujarat-consciousness. This is not the place to go into Munshi's efforts in this direction though it might be mentioned that Gujarat at that time presented a pitiable spectacle of fragmented sovereignty, divided as it was between Bombay Presidency, Baroda State and over three hundred Indian States. Munshi coined the word *Gujarat-ni Asmita* (*Asmita* is a term in *Yogasutra* to indicate one's I-consciousness) to emphasise the cultural unity of all Gujarati-speaking people, and for years he was the hot-gospeller of his idea.

His landmark address, *Gujarat Eka Sanskarik Vyakti*, (A Cultural unit) was, in the early twenties, a clarion call which echoed in the heart of Gujarat and gave articulate expression to the dormant aspirations of the people. It still provides inspiration to the rising generation of Gujaratis. In this address, Munshi delineates the peculiar characteristics of the Gujarati people. He points out that the principal geographical feature of Gujarat which has been its proximity to the sea has been

responsible for the ceaseless mercantile and maritime activities of its people. This led to the rise of a prosperous middle-class which acquired a relatively broad outlook born of international commerce. This outlook did not favour an ascetical or heroic attitude to life but fostered the instinct of adaptability and catholicity of spirit.

It must be stressed that Munshi's efforts to rouse Gujarat-consciousness did not stem from linguistic chauvinism or regional irredentism. Repeatedly does he stress that Gujarat is an inseparable part and parcel of India, that the foundation of Gujarat-consciousness is Indian nationalism, and forthrightly does he assert that Gujarat can have no meaning and no future except as an expression of Indian culture.

In another address, Munshi describes how Gandhiji transvalued values. It is a moving tribute to the great alchemist under whose spell the author himself came. There is a vivid description of the Bardoli satyagraha. Hemchandra and his services to Gujarat life and letters are pinpointed in one address. *Gujarāt-m-Asmita* can be said to have done pioneering work in the integration of the Gujarati-speaking people which was achieved under the leadership of Sardar Patel.

Adi Vachano is a collection of Munshi's inaugural addresses to the Gujarat Sahitya Parishad. The address, *Pranālikāvāda*, succinctly epitomises Munshi's revolt against the prevailing conventions in literature. At that time only such works were considered as literature which a father could read to his daughter without feeling embarrassed. Munshi raises his voice of protest against the fetters which this old-world canon imposed and avows that beauty is its own law. In another address, *Rasāsvadano Adhikāra*, Munshi expresses his fundamental creed that a literary artist is entitled to complete freedom in his

choice of subject and treatment, that conventions, and those in particular which are imposed in the name of religion, morals or respectability, destroy his soul. The sole test of literary effort is the success with which it reveals beauty. This beauty is not only the indefinable quality which makes creative art a source of undying joy but is intrinsically different from moral good. Literary criticism, according to Munshi, can only be a creative effort at interpreting the beauty of art as it strikes the critic's imagination.

The second volume of *Adh Vachano* contains Munshi's later addresses. In one of the addresses, he discusses the then thorny question of untouchability and points out that it is not sanctioned by Hindu scriptures as distinct from the man-made *shastras*. In another address, Munshi stresses the supremacy of moral order without which the world will lapse into confusion, followed by the law of the jungle. There is also a notable address on the delineation of historical characters in fiction. Munshi contends that historical romance is not history. To the novelist, history is only stage equipment; all that the creative artist can do is to bring the human beings of his age on the stage so equipped. In yet another address, Munshi distinguishes the eternal from the ephemeral elements in literature. He reiterates the true role of creative literature which is nothing but the expression of the author's inner richness in words of beauty.

The two volumes of *Ketlak Lekho* might well be termed a Munshi Miscellany for in them are collected the miscellaneous writings of Munshi from the time he started writing for magazines and newspapers. The subjects embrace a wide field and range from biography to history, from culture to literature, from social reform to education. There are brilliant thumb-nail sketches of great personalities.

like Mirabai, Buddha, Aurobindo Ghosh, Lokamanya Tilak and, of course, Gandhiji. The author's keen interest in social reform and his abhorrence of the evils of caste and marriage laws are evident in a few of the essays. The *piece de resistance* of this collection is the address entitled *Jivan-no Ulhas* in which he lashes out at the exponents of other-worldliness. Through a comparative study of old and modern Gujarati works, he finds that the other-worldliness of the old masters has disappeared; that modern works disclose a deep concern with life as is lived and that one of its chief characteristics is to refuse to treat women as a 'gateway to hell', but to look upon them as partners in the creative art of life. The address is an eloquent advocacy for enjoying life with zest. It may be said to be the epitome of Munshi's literary and philosophical credo.

Thodak Rasadarshano (Glimpses of Literary Beauty) created a great sensation at the time of its publication. At this distance of time, it may be difficult to understand the opposition that this book encountered. Munshi was at the time regarded as an iconoclast invading the tabernacles of convention and respectability. The book is a study of literary art and *bhakti* with special reference to Gujarati literature. Munshi makes a survey of the *bhakti* of Chaitanya, Narsinha, Mira and Premanand and concludes that *bhakti* is no more than sublimated sex-urge.

The author also takes up the oft-discussed question of beauty in literature. According to him, true literature mirrors human experience; such experience must first have been born in the writer's imagination and its outline harmonised by creative unity of conception. Then it must be expressed in words or images so vivid that the reader's imagination is stimulated and his sense of beauty thrilled with ecstasy. When the medium of words, which are more

than symbols, are so creatively used that they raise an image, emotion or impression similar to the one experienced by the author, and when their impact impresses the reader with a sense of harmony or perfection higher than which it is impossible for him to imagine or feel, then the level of beautiful literature is reached. Such creative use of words, says Munshi, is only possible when they stand for a richness of experience intensively lived by the author

In this volume, Munshi also describes his conception of life with its high ideals and deep meaning: 'The secrets of Aryan greatness lies in thus converting one's self into a characteristic force. When a man loses himself in the one idea round which his individuality revolves, he becomes resplendent, powerful, an elemental force. He attains irresistible grandeur... Similarly, when the unity which the imagination of two lovers calls into existence is visualised by them as being a single, undivided, changeless soul shared between them, the goal is reached. Love rules their life as beauty. Thus the secret of all beauty and greatness is not in remaining what *I am*, but in realising something beyond *I*—not in Being but in Becoming, *Bhavana*. For, in the process of Becoming only do I realise enduring joy. In studying the fundamentals of love and religious devotion, of literary beauty and human greatness, of sacrifice and duty, I have found but one underlying principle. Beauty in life as in literature lies only in attempts to achieve a Becoming of ever-growing magnitude.'

These volumes of miscellaneous writings are characterised by a refreshing iconoclastic note. In them, Munshi preaches the gospel of a new literary Romanticism. He fights for the liberty of the literary artist to express beauty in disregard of social or moral conventions. He leads a crusade against all forms of moral cowardice masquerading under the garb of tradition and respectability.

Appropriately enough, the style is trenchant and hard-hitting. Words are not regarded as fragrant flowers to be delicately woven into beautiful garlands. Munshi regards them as heavy-calibre weapons to be used in the fight against reaction. He wields alike the sledge-hammer stroke and the rapier thrust and his sarcasm has extreme penetrability.

These writings ushered in what may be termed the Munshi Era in Gujarati literature, and as such they have an abiding value as landmarks in its evolution.

CHAPTER XV

WORKS IN ENGLISH

MUNSHI at one time used to confess that expression in the English language is not his strong point, that he cannot always command the appropriate word or the expressive phrase or the correct idiom. This was an inferiority complex from which many Indian masters of the English language used to suffer. So great a stylist in English and so successful a wielder of that subtle language as the Rt. Hon'ble V. S. Srinivasa Sastri, who was apotheosized as the silver-tongued orator of the British Empire, used to be apologetic about his command of 'an alien language'. In Munshi's case, his education in a mofussil college increased his diffidence. And it is a measure of his diligence and persistence that he overcame this initial diffidence and has written a couple of dozen volumes in English on a variety of subjects ranging from history and philosophy to education and culture.

As one who has used his mother-tongue to marvellous effects, Munshi instinctively apprehends the subtleties, beauties, melodies and sound values of words. His English style is trenchant, well-set and bears the stamp of the writer's vigorous personality. There is no paucity of words, no dearth of expression. Language flows from his pen like fragrance from a flower enchanting all those who come across it. As his ideas sally forth in quick succession; they automatically adjust themselves into a coherent structure and attire themselves in appropriate linguistic garb. And the most noteworthy thing is that Munshi's expression suits itself admirably to the thought behind it. He is at times emotional, at other times sentimental and

retrospective; still at other times intellectual, logical and argumentative. Whatever the tone and temper of his thoughts and ideas, his language serves as a faithful mirror to them. He has the enviable gifts of pregnant thought and suggestive expression.

Munshi's English books can be broadly divided into four groups: Historical, Political, Philosophical and Miscellaneous.

I

Munshi has been a keen student of Indian history from his college days. And while weaving his historical romances, he saw and felt the form, continuity and meaning of India's past. He felt too the inadequacy of the so-called Indian histories. It was to supply the long felt want of a comprehensive history of India written by her own sons that Munshi organised the preparation and publication of *The History and Culture of the Indian People* in ten volumes. It is a piece of national service which Munshi has rendered; and it will be dealt with in the next volume while considering his constructive and cultural activities. Here we are concerned with the foreword that Munshi has written to each of the five volumes so far published. The foreword is no chronological catalogue of the events of the epoch with which the particular volume deals. It is a kaleidoscopic survey of the political, social, economic and cultural activities of the age. It is an assessment of the nature and direction of the momentous forces which worked through the life of India in that epoch. It is to be hoped that, when the ten volumes are completed, the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan would gather the forewords and publish them as a book. It would furnish a comprehensive yet concise view of the panorama of India's past. That book would be to India what G. K. Chesterton's *History*

of England has been to that country. It would influence historical scholarship and inspire younger historians to fresh and fruitful labour.

Gujarata and Its Literature was published in 1935 with a foreword by Mahatma Gandhi. The volume is the first and the best of its kind both in its attempt and achievement. It presents to the English-reading public an authentic and connected history of Gujarati literature—from the earliest times to the year of its publication. The chapters in the volume were originally intended to be delivered as extension lectures under the Post-Graduate Studies Department of the Calcutta University. But this could not be done as Munshi's participation in the Civil Disobedience movement of 1930 came in the way. However, during the two and half years between 1930 and 1934 that Munshi spent in jail, he found the necessary leisure and peace of mind to arrange the chapters in the shape of a volume. And in spite of the handicaps that jail life imposes on work of this nature, it must be said to the credit of the author that he succeeded in producing a memorable record—reliable in its facts and figures, deep in its insight and sympathetic in its interpretation, impartial in its treatment and just in its assessments.

The twenty-one chapters that comprise the three parts of the volume do not make dry-as-dust reading—as works of this kind often do. It is interesting to note that Munshi does not confine himself to Gujarati literature. His survey is more comprehensive and covers the literary works in the different languages which were produced in that part of India that is now called Gujarat. The languages include Sanskrit, Prakrit, Apabhramsa and Gujarati.

The literature of each period is descriptively and critically sketched on the back-ground of its historical setting. Furthermore, the author has given well-deserved

importance to the inter-play of two factors in the history of Gujarat, namely, (1) the individuality of Gujarati expressed through a consciously directed group life: and (2) the influence of the culture which, originating with the early Aryans, has maintained the homogeneity of Indian Life and the continuity of its traditions for the last three thousand years.

A significant chapter of the book is the one dealing with the Puranic revival of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Munshi points out how, in the wake of the Muslim conquest of India, the Puranas became, in the hands of the Brahmins, formidable instruments to preserve religion and culture. His assessment of the Puranic revival is worth reproduction: 'The Puranic revival preserved society and culture and directed literary energy into the channel of the *desabhasha*. It spread over the whole country and opened up prospects for all. Poets received fresh inspiration; Puranikas, a new vocation: philosophers, a new orientation. To the village saints, it gave something to live for; and it brought to the ordinary people, in the place of cumbrous ritual, *bhakti*, a worship full of song and joy, dance and prayer. Every province began to develop, and its literature assumed distinctive character.'

Of the *bhakti* school, Miranbai and Narasinha Mehta were the leading exponents. Munshi pays high tribute to the pure, noble, and loving personality of Miran and points out that her language is simple and appealing. 'Passion, grace, delicacy, melody —Miran has all these gifts. Her longing is exquisite; it seizes all hearts, penetrates all souls. Her poetic skill possesses the supreme art of being artless.' Of Narasinha Mehta, Munshi says that his life was inspired by a great philosophy; his heart went out to all men equally and he sought every opportunity to bring

solace to the lowly and wretched. Munshi concludes that the *padas* of Narasinha have given to men and women in Gujarat a glimmer of romance, of love, of the joy of life, which their humdrum every-day existence denied them.

Munshi deals with the gospel of other-worldliness which gained ascendancy during the seventeenth century and of which Akha Bhagata was the most strident exponent. Munshi characterises the credo of this school: 'A death-like existence in this life was a necessary precursor to happy existence after death. Woman was the gate of hell, the curse of creation, an encumbrance in this life, a hindrance to the next. To be a good man was to be a man dead to the joys of life. Thus this age evolved its gospel of living death.' Piquantly does Munshi conclude that neither art nor insight characterised their outlook on life.

With the emergence of Premananda, whom Munshi characterises as the greatest literary figure of the age, a new literary tradition came into existence; and the form, the expression, and the technique for which the *rasa* or *akhyana* stood, together with its frame-work of Puranic episodes or popular fiction, were made a medium for a realistic treatment of life. Of this new movement Munshi observes. 'Thus we see two authors — Premananda and Samala — standing in bright contrast to the murky background of other-worldliness which spread over two centuries, each proud of Gujarat and the Gujarati language, each a law unto himself. And, of the two, Premananda stands out foremost. Before his sturdy faith in life and joy, the background recedes like the disappearing mist. With a humorous twinkle in his eye and a joyous note in his voice, he passes on to his world-weary generation the inspiration of Vyasa.'

Munshi then points out how the period between 1707 and 1818 was one of wretchedness, disorder and misery for

Gujarat and how this was reflected in the revival of the gospel of otherworldliness. To this weary, lifeless age, came a genuine poet, 'his wings unclipped by convention, soaring on high in search of real art and emotion.' This was Dayarama who dared to be human. Munshi avers that with Dayarama died old Gujarat but even when he was alive, a new spirit was abroad and a new age was being ushered in. This was to flower with Narmad and Govardhanram. New Gujarat had arisen phoenix-like from the ashes of the old.

Well has the volume earned the praise of Dr. A. Berriedale Keith of the University of Edinburgh: 'It is not merely pioneer work, but the field is vast and the languages used range from Sanskrit through Prakrit and Apabhramsha to old and modern Gujarati, demanding an erudition remarkable in one who has given so much time to public service and who himself is an outstanding author, whose creative art (in the words of Dr. Taraporevala) has brought life and beauty to Gujarati fiction and drama, and whose philosophy of life has given to Gujarat both joy and strength. It is indeed the outstanding merit of Munshi's work that it is written by one who has studied deeply both the great masters of European literature and the theory of art, and who can thus put true values on the work of the long series of writers of Gujarat. Where it is possible for me to test his judgment, it appears singularly happy and accomplished, and Gujarat should be deeply grateful to him for his work of love, which recognises her accomplishment in letters, but with admirable candour does not seek to conceal the shortcomings.'

The first edition of the book brought the survey to 1933. But in the second revised and enlarged edition (published in 1954 by the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan) the author has stopped with 1852. It is hoped that Munshi

would soon complete the second volume and bring it up-to-date.

It was but appropriate that Munshi who campaigned for the cultural unity of Gujarat and depicted its past in historical romances should delve into the history of Gujarat. At one time, he planned four sumptuous volumes under the title—*Glory that was Gurjaradesha*. This work was undertaken in connection with the millennial celebrations of Mularaja Solanki who ascended the throne of Anahilawad Patan in 998 of the Samvat era. The Gujarat Sahitya Parishad, which conducted the celebrations, entrusted the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan with the task of getting a history of Chaulukya Gujarat prepared in English. And Munshi undertook the responsibility of being the General Editor of the volumes planned. The first volume was published but in an incomplete form. To this book, Munshi contributed the second section entitled “Aryans: Pre-Vedic and Vedic”. The third volume in the series, *The Imperial Gurjaras*, was entirely written by Munshi. The other volumes, however, could not be prepared for want of competent scholars willing to undertake the work. As a result, the scheme had to be abandoned. Several requests were made to Munshi to retrieve the volumes already published. So he thoroughly revised *The Imperial Gurjaras*, adding new introductory chapters and overhauling and rewriting several chapters. The result was *The Glory that was Gurjaradesa* in two volumes published by the Bhavan's Book University.

Munshi contends that the whole of the period from 550 to 1300 A.D is organic and he finds no justification for splitting it up into dynastic or regional records. Nor does he agree to call this the Rajput period which nomenclature only perpetuates the faulty outlook which Col. Todd constructed out of the Agnikula legend. Munshi observes:

'The name Rajput, given to warriors of the old Gurjara-desa by the Turks and Afghans, coupled with theories of their foreign origins, has created a mist which shuts out the historian's mind from a true perspective of this period. A historian of India in pursuit of scientific research need not reduce a living past into the classified bones of un-connected dynasties and racial analysis.'

The fortunes of the three great families of the Pratiharas, the Paramaras and the Chaulukyas who ruled over Gurjara-desa are treated in detail and Munshi points out that each had noteworthy characteristics. 'Many of the Pratiharas were warriors, statesmen and empire-builders. The Paramara kings, except perhaps Siyaka, were impulsive, generous to a fault, highly cultured and devoted to learning, but they lacked the steely glitter which characterised the ambition of the Pratiharas. The Chaulukyas were courageous beyond measure, shrewd, irrepressible and possessed of a tenacity which defied adverse circumstances and powerful neighbours.'

To reconstruct the past history of a country or a people, especially when authentic material and evidences are scarce, is indeed an uphill task. It bristles with knotty problems involving intimate acquaintance with epigraphy, iconography, geology, geography, history, sociology and allied subjects. Munshi has surmounted these obstacles and given a cogent and connected history of the three empires which flourished in Gujarat between A.D. 550 and 1300. Besides throwing new light on old problems, Munshi has depicted vividly the social, economic and cultural life of the people and pinpointed the inner springs of action which lead to the rise and fall of nations. He has traced the correlation of the collective will as found in political action expressing itself through social

changes and legal institutions Medieval Gujarat lives and pulsates through these two volumes.

The Saga of Indian Sculpture is a panorama of India's achievements in the domain of plastic arts in a manner which is both intellectually convincing and aesthetically satisfying. The book contains 185 plates which practically cover all branches of the subject. Many new illustrations like the specimens of the Kanouj school, Somanath school and relief sculptures from Abhneri are published for the first time. The collection is eloquent of the underlying magnificence and mystery of Indian art. To this Munshi has added the pragmatism of judgment of the man of affairs. In a lengthy introduction, he views the innumerable sculptures of India's ageless past as a thinker and historian. He points out that ancient Indian art was not religious in the sense in which European art of the Middle Ages was religious nor was it secular in the modern sense of giving no more than aesthetic pleasure. Ancient India did not divide art, religion and philosophy into water-tight compartments. In tracing the origin and growth of Indian art, Munshi shows a deep understanding of the course of Indian emotions through the centuries which governed the fashioning of these sculptures. Skilfully does he demonstrate that Indian philosophy has found visual application in Indian art or, in other words, that Indian art is applied philosophy in a brilliant series of graphic forms which make the abstruse principles of philosophy accessible to the common man. Feelingly did Dr O C Ganguli, the greatest living art critic, plead, in the course of an encomiastic review of this book, for the establishment of an Indian Ministry of Fine Arts and conclude that 'we know no better person to take charge of this portfolio than the distinguished ex-Governor of Uttar Pradesh.'

Somanath, The Shrine Eternal was published on the occasion of the installation ceremony of the linga in the new Somanath Temple on May 11, 1951. Since his college days, Munshi had dreamt of the vanished glories of Gujarat. He had been the hot-gospeller of *Gujarat-m Asmita*. He had discovered in "Jaya Somanath" Gujarat's ancient battle cry and used it as an invocation to effort and not as an epitaph on failure. It was given to him to play a prominent part in the reconstruction of the Somanath temple which a distinguished statesman characterised as an act of historic justice. This book was written in great hurry under the stress of pressing preoccupations of a varied nature. It may be mentioned that during this time, Munshi, as Union Minister for Food and Agriculture, had to face many difficulties; and when the book was in print, he was away in Burma negotiating a rice deal. Even so, the book is a compendium of information about the temple which has been the eternal symbol of Hindu faith and the destruction of which by Mahmud Ghazni had been burnt into the Collective Subconscious of the race as an unforgettable national disaster.

Munshi traces the vicissitudes of the great shrine from prehistoric times. He describes succinctly the five temples which were successively built at Prabhas Patan. Munshi recaptures the glory and grandeur that was Somanath and pictures its endless pilgrims and its valiant defenders. Munshi describes graphically the events leading to the reconstruction of the temple. The accession of the dog loving, double-dealing Nawab of Junagadh to Pakistan, the formation of the *Arzi Hukumat* or the Provisional Government, the revolt of the people and the flight of the Nawab, the invitation of the Diwan to the Government of India to take over the administration and the subsequent events are etched in a style at once terse and telling.

Oscar Wilde is said to have quipped that any fool can make history, only a genius can write it. In *The End of an Era*, Munshi proves that he can both make and record history. The book is a slice of intensified history, of the epochal year following the advent of freedom. The prominent part played by Munshi in the integration of Hyderabad has already been narrated in a previous volume. Here is the colourful and authentic account of the whole episode from the pen of one of the heading *dramatis personae*. This stimulating book, which is illustrated with over a dozen photographs having themselves historical significance, is something more than a mere narrative of the events leading to the integration of Hyderabad. It is an extremely interesting and important story, told with sincerity and restraint, which reveals how the consolidation of the country on the verge of sequestration was brought about so swiftly and peacefully.

Munshi narrates, in an exhaustive introductory chapter, how the British built up the framework of princely India to serve as spokes in the wheel of the country's political progress. He points out the disastrous implications of the lapse of paramountcy envisaged in the Mountbatten Plan for the partition of India and the relinquishment of British power. Munshi etches the deft manner in which Sardar Patel solved the problem of the five hundred odd states by first getting them to accede to India on Defence, External Affairs and Communications and later by integrating them into the pattern of the Republic.

Munshi traces the history of the Asaf Jahi dynasty of Hyderabad and conclusively shows that at no time since the State came into subsidiary alliance with the English East India Company was it treated any differently from

other Indian States. A vivid picture is given of the day-dreams of the present Nizam to assert his independence after the British had left India. The meteoric rise of Kasim Razvi and the startling growth of the Ittehad-ul-Muslimeen and its storm-troopers, the Razakars, are described in vivid detail. It must be mentioned that Munshi's thumbnail sketches of Razvi, Laik Ali, Moin Nawaz Jung and other Hyderabad leaders are entirely free from rancour and they err on the side of generosity.

A graphic account is given of the strenuous efforts made by Munshi to persuade the Laik Ali Ministry to implement the Standstill Agreement. It was apparent to Munshi that Laik Ali's aim was not the fulfilment of the Agreement but the enlargement of its scope. Munshi makes no secret of the fact that he was far from happy at the interminable negotiations which Lord Mountbatten had with the Hyderabad delegation and at the concessions granted. Referring to the role of Sir Walter Monckton, Munshi says that Lord Mountbatten had no mental reservation while dealing with him; with the Nizam, unfathomable mental reservation was a congenital gift.

How the Police Action was viewed in Hyderabad is narrated for the first time in this book. With mordant sarcasm, Munshi refers again and again to the Peacock Airborne Division which never materialised.

The End of an Era demolishes the naive assumption that the Nizam was a helpless creature in the hands of unscrupulous counsellors. On the other hand, Munshi proves that he was the architect of his own downfall. The masterful role played by Sardar Patel in the whole episode is well brought out. The book, which is spiced with interesting anecdotes, makes engrossing reading and it has great historical value.

II

Munshi's outstanding contribution to permanent Indian political literature is his personal document, *I Follow the Mahatma*. It ranks with memorable interpretations of Gandhiji and his message such as Dr. Pattabhi's *Gandhi and Gandhism* and Acharya Kripalani's *The Gandhian Way*. Munshi's book does not claim to be an objective study of Gandhiji or a record of his achievements. It is an authentic narrative of Munshi's personal reactions to Gandhiji and his activities, a record of how his outlook on many essentials of modern Indian life underwent a change as a result of contact with Gandhiji, and how, in the new light, Munshi came to view Gandhiji and the technique and philosophy with which his name is associated. It is likely that many may not agree with some of Munshi's views and conclusions. But the merit of the book consists in the fact that it has been worked out in the light of personal experience and convictions. It is as such that the book may be of help to the general reader in understanding the mighty Indian Colossus. Munshi narrates in the book how he came to accept the Mahatma's political philosophy, and, in so doing, reveals not only the development of his own personality but also the tremendous power which Gandhiji possessed over all with whom he came in contact, through his creed of Truth and Non-Violence in politics. Further, some of the chapters in the book give us the inside story of many crises in India's struggle for freedom. Two chapters are devoted to the language problem in India, and the last part of the book stands out as the finest exposition of Gandhian philosophy. Of particular interest are the author's views regarding the application of Gandhian principles to the new world order that was expected to emerge out of the womb of the Second World

War. It only remains to be added that Munshi in this book lives up to his literary reputation. His powerful yet breezy style renders the reading of the book lively. The reader is borne from chapter to chapter with never-fagging interest.

Gandhi: the Master is a collection of Munshi's later articles on Gandhiji. Here too the approach is subjective. He frankly confesses: 'To me, he was a living commentary on the Gita and the Yogasutra. I tried to study what he was rather than what he did. I tried haltingly to follow his directions; often I could not. But one thing I learnt from him was to be true to oneself first—a very difficult thing to do. Of that supreme art of life, the art of attaining absolute integration of personality, he was the Master.'

The *piece de resistance* of this collection which ranges from the Yeravda Pact of 1932 to Gandhiji's fast of 1947, is the essay on "Gandhiji and Gujarati Literature." The analysis of Gandhiji's prose style will bear reproduction: 'Mahatma Gandhi has given to Gujarat prose a new sense of power. His vocabulary has been drawn from many sources. His style, though sometimes loosely woven in construction, is direct, clear and easily comprehensible, the result of precise thinking and an incessant effort to avoid the devious by-paths of rhetoric and sophistry. An unerring sense of proportion keeps both expression and imagination under judicious restraint. The literary element is always subordinated to the author's prime motive, which is to touch the living chord in the reader's heart and vivify him into action. Sometimes, and particularly in *Atmakatha*, the style carries itself with grace. The charms are disposed of well and wisely, and become part of the general effect, not the main source of it. His thunder acquires a severe majesty, his appeal its persuasiveness, his

confession its poignancy, as much by a proper use of the proper word as by his personality. Sometimes, he is slyly humorous or playful. But he prefers monotony of expression to a varied literary effect. With him, beauty of expression has to be a humble housemaid to Truth. And the reader invariably falls under the spell of the bare, sheer, penetrating power of every line of his, which, under the stress of some great emotion, attains biblical strength.'

Akhand Hindustan (published in January 1942) proved to be quite a provocative volume at the time of its appearance and presented Munshi before the public in a peculiar light—both favourable and unfavourable. Champions of Pakistan beheld in the author of *Akhand Hindustan*, a sinister hot-gospeller of Hindu domination, while protagonists of Indian nationalism found fault with him equally for unnecessarily raking up old sores, for rubbing the communal problem on the wrong side. But neither of these, it may be said without fear of contradiction, understood Munshi and his work properly. *Akhand Hindustan* reveals him as a devout student of the history and culture of India, as a sincere interpreter of its essential unity, and as the vigorous supporter of the concept of undivided India. The volume contains about thirty chapters—articles written and speeches delivered by Munshi between 1938 and 1942, all of which were the outcome of an effort to study and present the indisputable unity which runs through the history, culture and life of India. And, if at times, the reader finds the tone and spirit of the book to be somewhat aggressive, it is to be attributed to nothing else but to the fact that Munshi believes in the fundamental unity of India, which unity, according to him, is not only to be felt but visualised, worked for and, if need be, fought for. How the author of *Akhand Hindustan* accepted the partition of India has already been narrated in the

previous volume. But the book will ever remain as a tribute to Munshi's courage of frank and fearless utterance.

The Changing Shape of Indian Politics is in reality a revised, altered and considerably enlarged edition of Munshi's earlier work, *The Indian Deadlock* (1945.) The first edition was a collection of the author's articles in the *Social Welfare*, suitably altered and concluded with the memorandum he submitted to the Sapru Committee. To them were added, in the second edition, several other articles, so as to bring the book up-to-date. Though written at different times during a period of three years, these articles form connected studies of the problems of Indian politics during the war years, the shape of which was changing from day to day. The work was designed to help the country to think on lines which would lead to power and freedom. Munshi offers a noble defence of India's claim for unity and her right to freedom. With great critical acumen and characteristic vigour, he examines Prof Coupland's case against Indian Nationalism and exposes the many logical fallacies that vitiate the well-known Oxford scholar's thinking. The articles incorporated in this volume bear ample testimony to Munshi's remarkable insight into the puzzling politics of the country, to his original way of thinking and arguing and to the compelling power of his pen. Among other things, the author presents a brilliant analysis of the kaleidoscopic changes through which Indian politics passed during those years, and makes many valuable suggestions that reflect the constructive bent of his mind. The volume is marked by bold and fearless thinking, independent judgment, penetrating analysis and lucid exposition.

The Ruin that Britain Wrought (1946) is a powerful indictment of British rule in India. With a wealth of facts and figures, Munshi shows how the British destroyed

India's industry, drained away its resources and kept it undernourished, underdeveloped, backward. Even today, the book has considerable value, though it is over eleven years since Britain quitted India. This study of the pitiable economic condition of India under British rule would help to understand better the phenomenal achievements of India in the first decade of its freedom.

III

In *Bhagavad Gita and Modern Life* and in the *Creative Art of life*, we get a clear picture of Munshi's personality, of his soaring imagination and unequivocal expression.

Perennial has been the inspiration of *Gita* through the centuries. Ever since the *Gita* was first churned into shape in the dim past of history, it has never been out of fashion or favour. The *Upanishads* are the cows, Krishna is the Milker, Arjuna is the calf, and the nectar-like *Gita* is the excellent milk, observed Dr. Radhakrishnan once. And on this "honey dew" and "milk of paradise" have been fed countless souls. Each passing age, each eager and aspiring soul has discovered afresh the underlying truth of the *Gita* Shankara, Ramanuja, Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, Vivekananda, Tilak, Sri Aurobindo, Mahatma Gandhi—these are among the innumerable interpreters of the message of the *Gita*. To this august band belongs Munshi.

Bhagavad Gita and Modern Life reveals to the public a comparatively less known aspect of Munshi's sturdy personality, the basic spiritual texture of his self as coloured and moulded by the *Gita*. None else except those who have understood correctly the deepest implications of the *Gita*, and whose understanding of it is instinctive, can ever speak of it in a convincing and authentic tone. Munshi's *Gita* essays bear this indubitable stamp. As one

reads through the chapters—especially those entitled—“The Urge to Action”, “Dynamic Unity”, “Svabhava: The Basis of Perfection”, “Chaturvarnya: Its Ideal and Practice”, “Sublimation of the Sex Urge: The Path of Beauty and God”—one cannot but rub one's eyes in wonder at the illuminated interpretation of the underlying conceptions.

The first part of the book deals with the place and meaning of the *Gita* and refers to it as a symbol of India's determination to reach the fullest measure of self-realisation. Munshi makes a forceful plea for a potent expression of the dynamic will based on a complete coordination of all one's powers. The chapters dealing with Brahmacharya make extremely fascinating reading. Munshi's treatment of the Birth of Beauty and the concept of 'Indwelling' holds the reader in thrall by its poetic conception and realistic delineation. Drawing copiously from his own interesting and intimate experiences and from his wise and wide reading of the world's literature, Munshi presents the *Gita* as annotated by the thoughts and lives of the most exalted and the noblest among mankind so that this eternal book may 'shape life in all its modernity and richness'. The book bears the impress of Munshi's versatile scholarship and the strength of his convictions. Not written on conventional lines, it helps to relate the *Gita* to the problems of the present world.

The Creative Art of Life belongs to a class by itself—a book dealing with a profound subject in a profound manner. It bears the sub-title—Studies in Education. But it does not deal with pedagogy or psychology in the conventional sense of the words. The meaning of education in the real sense of the term, as understood by our wise ancients, the cultural, creative, and spiritual aspects of education, the ultimate end and aim of human existence,

all these silhouetted against the glorious background of the ageless thought and traditions of India—this is *The Creative Art of Life*. Indian culture is not a plant of hot-house growth ‘It must be viewed as the movement of a Central Idea flowing through time, absorbing alien influences, sometimes running underground but always inspiring individuals and movements to express it under the changed conditions of their time. In each period, it has expressed itself, with easily ascertainable permanence, in the life of our great men, in the output of our art and literature, in our solution of vital problems This Central Idea is a living reality. Men have derived exquisite joy by living it. It has passed through the fresh coverings of succeeding ages. This reality must be studied in forces, movements, motives, and ideas which have persisted through time. It must be rediscovered by each generation, and above all lived The resurgence of Asia has to be achieved. Humanity, which is in the grip of force and fraud and a regimentation based on a denial of human dignity, has to be weaned away from Westernism This can only be done by India, free and great which is a true embodiment of her culture Indian education must prepare men and women fit for their work It must make them *Bharatiya* in spirit and outlook, true to the Motherland, striving ceaselessly for the integration of their own personality and prepared for the day when the world would learn from them the rudiments of the supreme Art of Life-energy taught by the Masters.’ Thus argues the author in *The Creative Art of Life* The book is not a blueprint for Indian education, it is only a sign-post. Munshi’s emphasis on the “formative” education as against the merely “informative”, on creativity and on the development of *Svabhava*, his conception of the teacher as an apostle of culture and of the pupil as an artist in

self-culture—these are things worth the careful consideration of all those who have the best interests of Indian education at heart.

IV

Munshi's miscellaneous writings consist of collections of his addresses, lectures, essays and articles.

In his preface to *Sparks from the Anvil*, Munshi says that sometimes he has written under the impact of an upsurge from within. 'They flew as sparks as if by the impact of a hammer stroke, effortlessly bearing the impress of something which I have genuinely lived, felt or seen.' In this volume are collected tributes to contemporaries expressed spontaneously or diary notes. The contemporaries include Gandhiji, Sardar Patel, Pandit Nehru, Romain Rolland, Dr. Annie Besant, Pandit Malaviya, Satyamurti, Bhulabhai Desai and others.

In one of the personal essays, Munshi describes how a Pillar of Fire led him on in all his struggles and how he realised the two truths fundamentally woven into Aryan Culture: 'My individual nature alone prescribed my way of life; to pursue this way was the law of my being; any other law for me was false and fraught with fear. To be ready to die any minute to fulfil this law of life was my self-realization—this was the first of the two Truths. The other Truth which I perceived rent for me, once and for ever, the curtain separating creative art from creative life: whenever my concentration on any object or experience was steadfast, vivid and intense, to the elimination of my consciousness of being myself, it became creative; and creation followed.'

Our Greatest Need and other Addresses gives permanent form to the occasional addresses delivered by Munshi from time to time either as convocation addresses

or ministerial pronouncements or inaugural lectures. Though parts of the book were thus casual in their origin, the book has nothing casual about it. It is not a heap of scrapings and shavings hurriedly put together. It is more—much more—than the chips from the baskets of a busy and vocal politician. It has the coherence and unity of a book, and has the fervour of an earnestness that is half intellectual, half spiritual in its impulsion. Its argument is well-articulated and is presented without the irritating iteration so characteristic of books assembled together from stray lectures.

The lectures fall into their proper places. The addresses are organized into four parts. The Fundamental Values, the Collective Organism of Life, the Binding Forces and the Collective Unconscious. Munshi is as versatile as he is vital and vigorous, and he speaks with the same ease and persuasiveness on subjects as varied as the retention of English in India, the promotion of Hindi, the Conservation of Sanskritic tradition, the preservation of forest wealth, the need to protect the cow who is the Mother of Plenty, the sad neglect of the horse, Vikramaditya, Creative Education, the meaning of Culture, the need to forge links between India and the world. Dr K. R. Srinivasa Aiyengar in his preface to the book says that 'buoyancy and earnestness, the stern logic of facts and the compelling eloquence of clear statement, wide-ranging scholarship and an integral point of view give these addresses an urgency and an importance not ordinarily associated with such seemingly random sparks from an alert mental forge.'

The Gospel of the Dirty Hand is a collection of Munshi's speeches delivered when he was the Union minister for Food and Agriculture. In these speeches, Munshi has enunciated a philosophy and a faith, which he calls

the art of Land Transformation, the essence of which is the restoration of unity between man and nature. Man must integrate himself to his environment; he must return to the soil what he receives from it; he must be soilminded; he must not shun dirt and mud on the excuse of superior culture. He must maintain an equilibrium between himself and his environment, thereby preserving the Cycle of Life unbroken. In this Cycle, trees, human beings and animals, particularly the stud bull and the cow, their food and their waste, all have a place. The essence of Life's Cycle is to maintain a symbiosis, a balance and an equilibrium between them. Disturb the balance and you destroy life. The great enthusiasm he created in the mass planting of trees—the *Vana Mahotsava*—and other similar campaigns can only be understood against this background. *The Gospel of the Dirty Hand* is but one aspect of his faith in the art and philosophy of Land Transformation. The message is conveyed convincingly and attractively.

Sparks from a Governor's Anvil (in two volumes) is a collection of speeches delivered and broadcast talks given by Munshi during his governorship of Uttar Pradesh from 1952 to 1957. They range from convocation addresses to speeches at such diverse functions as the All-India Dental Conference and the welcome to the Indian Hockey team. These speeches illustrate the extraordinary range of his mind. There is hardly any subject on which he has not found something original, and if possible challenging, to say from the fundamental basis of morals to improving the Devanagiri script. In these speeches, Munshi exemplifies his unparalleled knack of investing the humdrum affairs of life with the glow of romance. He can speak on the necessity of manual labour and invoke the *Taittriya Upanishad*; he can illuminate a speech on *gosadan* with a

Puranic phrase. If he visits Badrinath, he invests it with the colour of romance and devotion as in the spacious days of yore Munshi's ardent love for Uttar Pradesh, the homeland of India's immortal spirit, is all too evident in this collection of gubernatorial addresses. These two volumes provide a sort of quintessence of Munshi, the daring thinker and the mellifluous speaker.

The three volumes—*Janu's Death and other Kulapati's Letters*, *City of Paradise and other Kulapati's Letters* and *The Wolf Boy and other Kulapati's Letters*—stand in a class by themselves. A little explanation is necessary as to how Munshi started writing this fortnightly feature. In 1952 he had decided not to seek re-election to Parliament and he was looking forward to participating in the activities of the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan of which he is the *Kulapati* or the President. But he was offered the Governorship of Uttar Pradesh, the biggest State in India, and he accepted it. Munshi knew that for the next five years, he would have few opportunities of frequent participation in the activities of the Bhavan. So he started writing a fortnightly letter which was intended as a home-chat for the members, staff and students of the Bhavan and its allied institutions. Even in the very inaugural letter, he made it clear that he was writing these letters for the young, for, in his own words 'none who feels old will have any interest in what I have to say and none who feels young need call himself old simply because the calendar tells him so.'

A number of newspapers syndicated this feature which began to enjoy an enviable coverage being relayed throughout the country. The letters became immensely popular due to transparent sincerity and brilliant exposition. They indicated a new path, they offered a goal to strive for, they encouraged man's faith in his aspirations.

In response to public request, these letters have been brought together in book form. Three volumes have so far been published.

These volumes provide rich and varied fare. The topics vary with the author's mood of the fortnight. They range from 'the Wolf Boy' to 'Duryodhana's Feeding Bottle,' from 'Begum Samru' to 'Neo-Malthusians'. The reader keeps company with Munshi in journeying to sacred places, taking dips in holy rivers and tanks, enjoying the company of sadhus and savants, seeing historical episodes in vivid colours and laughing at human follies and foibles.

The undertone of the letters is intensely personal and is reminiscent of President Roosevelt's 'Fireside Chats.' It is as though Munshi, seated in an easy chair of an evening, is relating some anecdote or talking on a social theme or narrating a historical episode or describing a picturesque journey to his young friends. Both thought and expression sparkle in myriad patterns and the style glistens and varies in tune with the theme. In these volumes, Munshi soars high as an engaging and entertaining writer.

This chapter on Munshi's works in English cannot be better concluded than by quoting what the late Prof. V. N. Bhushan wrote of them over a decade ago: "What one notices first is the refinement of his ideas and utterances. There is no pose or dilettantism about him. With his deep reverence for Indian culture, his sincere attachment to the teachings of the *Gita*, his sturdy sentiment of patriotism, his intellectual honesty and emotional bias—Munshi speaks with a voice at once authentic and authoritative."

CHAPTER XVI

MUNSHI ON HIS OWN WORKS

A MAN who has written over fifty books in most branches of prose in his mother-tongue and a couple of dozen books in English must be having certain springs of action, certain reserves of the spirit to sustain and replenish him during his arduous task, and to give him a steady sense of direction Books are not mechanically written, speeches are not automatically delivered. The innate spiritual urge and crystallized intellectual convictions constitute the pull to which one is yoked. An analysis of this 'pull' is always interesting as it reveals the author's personality. Luckily, Munshi has the unique gift of turning the search-light on himself and helping us with a self-analysis An author's estimate of his own work has to be taken with a certain amount of reserve; but happily it is not so in the case of Munshi who could lay bare even his personal life with brutal frankness and objectivity.

Munshi has no illusions about his works. Replying to the felicitations on his Diamond Jubilee at a reception arranged by the Gujarati Literary Association, Munshi said

During the last two generations, my literary work has been, to Gujarat, like the poison in Shiva's throat—something which it can neither throw out nor swallow Most of my readers have loved to read my books; many have been shocked at some of them —some genuinely, some so as not to lose respectability. But my work has been with life as it is lived, not with life as, in the opinion of prudes or saints, it should be lived.

Munshi has stressed the very same point in a letter he

wrote to Prof. I. J. S. Taraporevala in 1934 who wrote the chapter on his literary works for the book: *Gujarata and its Literature*. Prof. Taraporevala wanted Munshi to give him his own view of some of the aspects of his art. That letter gives a clear analysis of the principal features which Munshi brought to Gujarati fiction and it is reproduced below.

In my early years I never had the benefit of a regular study of the Gujarati language. And since I began to write in Gujarati, I had, for the purpose, to steal hurried moments out of a busy life devoted to more than one absorbing activity. These circumstances often make me unconscious of my lapses in grammar, syntax and spelling. No one is more painfully conscious of these unforgivable blemishes than I am. But I could not postpone literary work till I got moments of leisure, for such a good fortune was not likely to come my way; and this work was not only recreation but an inspiration and a shaping influence. Most of my works have a nucleus of personal experience. They also have a value when they were written of having been the formative training for overcoming a weakness or going a step towards a higher evolution.

In the beginning, my style, I think, contributed considerably to the appeal of my works. My familiarity with Gujarati literature was indeed scant, when the temperamental imperative impelled me to seek self-expression through fiction. My favourite authors, Carlyle, De Quincey and Landor among the English, and Hugo, Michelet and Alexandre Dumas among the French had, unconsciously, furnished me the models on which to build the technique of my style, such as it was at first. And at first, its resources

had to be drawn from the little Sanskrit I knew, and from the different varieties of colloquial Gujarati prevailing in Surat, Broach and Bombay. These regions have supplied to my style their racy elements which so horrify the purist from north Gujarat. During the last thirty-five years, however, I have, with varying success, attempted many and varying notes which Gujarati prose can possibly be made to yield; though it must be admitted that I have failed to achieve a style with lyrical touch or intellectual power, stately dignity or simple grace. Sometimes a dazzling brilliance of language hides my meaning. Abruptness of expression, on occasions, leaves the thought vague or incomplete. A desire for sustaining breathless interest has often deprived my style of the grace of rhythmic syllabic movement. But the wide range of expression, which I have attempted, will perhaps point the way to fresh and more successful experiments. And the varieties of style, for instance, of the narrative, the dramatic and the picturesque in which I have attained some measure of success will offer, to the authors of the future, fields for yet greater triumphs.

The principal features which I brought to fiction in Gujarati were an interesting story, dramatic situation and dialogue and living characters. I was, and still am, first and foremost, a story-teller, not a moralist, and I had before me the art of the greatest story-teller in the world's literature, Alexandre Dumas. My stories, as critics have repeatedly observed, move with breathless interest. In *Patan-m Prabhuta* and *Prithvi Vallabh*, the main plot occupies no more than a fortnight. The situations generally are full of dramatic possibility and the dialogue unfolding

character swiftly carries forward the action

My principal effort has always been to restrict myself to painting human beings; not saints, nor the conventional dummies so beloved of prudes and schoolmasters, nor pale abstractions; but full-blooded men and women who love and fight and sin and struggle as in actual life. My practical concern has been with the real drama of life, neither theories of life nor morals. In spite of the past three decades of effort on the part of the critics to teach me the contrary, I have found it impossible to look upon a historical novel as anything but a romantic speculation. A bygone age, as it actually was, can never be recreated by a literary artist. He can treat the past as an alien world and its men as myths, and occupy himself with hauling its upholstery into the present; or he can project the drama of life around him on the screen of the past. As I have understood it, the art of Kalidasa and Shakespeare, of Scott, Hugo and Dumas is of the latter variety. And with my limited powers, I have always endeavoured to keep the ideal of this art before me and scrupulously discarded wooden dolls for human beings. Even the venerable figures of Puranic mythology have been kept rooted to the earth, though characters like Prithvi Vallabh, the gay warrior, Lopamudra, the embodiment of triumphant beauty, have like the statues of Phedias, more than mortal stature. This enabled me to attempt, with some success, to keep my characters human, to bring the historical romances into close correspondence with life. Romanticism, I felt, was too much in the clouds and those also rather woolly.

A still stronger realism characterised my social novels and dramas. From Jasubha, the light-hearted

Indian Prince in *Ver-ni Vasulat* to Indrajita the weak schoolmaster and Shashi, the new woman, in *Kaka-ni Shashi* and Joito, the petty Mehta in *Agnan-kuta* and Dhankore, the jealous and loving wife in *Peedagrast Professor*, scarcely any one of my characters is untrue to life. The situation, sometimes, has a tendency to be strained, but it is rarely unnatural. This tendency to sound the realistic note has kept me away from dealing with village life with which I have not been in intimate touch.

Another feature of my literary art is perhaps my inordinate tendency to depict a clash between men and women of power and ambition with dramatic intensity. Such intensity is naturally produced when persons feel strongly, express boldly and act decisively. There are, no doubt, in the picture gallery characters like Rama in *Ver-ni Vasulat* who obliterate themselves or yield sweetly, and many who are weak, foolish or pompous, but their outlines are scarcely striking. I lacked the touch which produces men and women with softer shades of character. The dominant note of many of my works is love, not a thing to be talked of in a hushed voice or stifled by conventional situations or poetic phrases, but love, as in actual life, bestriding the world, leaving footprints in tears, in blood, in defiance of moral precepts, sanctimonious humbugs and cold-blooded prudes. I have tried to view it through a great number of varying situations, mostly taken from life, and through its weakness and strength, its anguish and turmoil and tragedy, its sublime surrender and no less glorious joy, portray its dynamic force. I have done it in the belief that in its frank delineation alone lies its poetry and glory, and its only chance of escape

from sordidness and vulgarity. In pursuing this idea, I have been guilty of offending against the literary conventions of this country. But life, in its reality alone, is sacred to me; not so much the laws made to bind it.

I am afraid I have been unconventional in yet one more respect. I love great piquant situations, like the rowdy feast of intoxicated collegians in *Swapnadrishtha*; or the strange experiences of a man and woman, perfect strangers, locked up in the same bed-room by the mistake of the host that they were man and wife in the short story *Kamachalau Dharmapatni* (The Temporary Wife). I am afraid I have flippantly and maliciously dealt with those who imagine that they have mastered sexual self-control in *Brahmacharyashrama*, where political prisoners take the vow of continence in jail, and end by wrangling over a village girl.

Few critics, indeed, have disputed the art with which such incidents have been told, but the choice of such subjects for literary handling has been disapproved. Not subscribing to the canons of literary respectability laid down by some medæval moralists, it has not been possible for me to place any barrier to my choice of a situation, so long as it has artistic possibilities. A jolly good laugh or even malicious fun, may be at the expense of a venerable thing, is too precious a thing in life to be missed even in literature."

On the occasion of his Diamond Jubilee celebrations, Munshi took the opportunity to view himself in the long perspective of modern Indian renaissance. This is what he said about his works and his place in the Indian renaissance:—

The welcome, the appreciation, the affection which I see around me, are not for me, the individual, but firstly for the heroes and heroines of my books, who for thirty-five years have found a home in the heart of my readers, and secondly for the vision of a great and undivided Motherland which I have seen myself, and which, in my own little way, I have invited others to see.

I will tell you of a little maiden, Tanman, who sprang from the imagination of a fresh lawyer; she was the dreambride of a college student, for years he had created her out of longing, tears and despair.

I created her in my first novel for she was haunting me But, as the world is made, the immediate reason was the offer of 70 annas every week by an enterprising weekly; and I wanted the money for my dhobi, part-time servant and vegetables I concealed my identity as her author, for, I was afraid of creating an impression on old Solicitors that I was doing something so hideously unprofessional as to write about the loves of little girls Particularly I stood in dread of old Jamietram, the great Solicitor, who was sponsoring my entry into the Bombay Bar, for he always told me that law was a jealous mistress And I hated all mistresses, jealous or tolerant.

But every Monday—the weekly instalment was published on every Sunday—the old Solicitors talked, expressing themselves about the little heroine with a glint in their eyes which belied the years that they carried on their shoulders

Then I wrote my first historical novel Without my intending it, I had hurt the feelings of young Jain friends by portraying a Jain Sadhu With characteristic modernity, they wanted to collect funds

and approach the government for sanction to prosecute the unknown author who had, according to them, attempted to create hostilities between classes of His Majesty's subjects. And like veritable Sherlock Holmes, they tried to track down this vile criminal.

I came to know about it and trembled. The vision of a placard "King Emperor v. Kanaialal Munshi" haunted me day and night. I was penniless, and knew not how I could defend myself. I saw before me my career gone, my future blasted.

In my wretchedness, I turned to Jamietramkaka I went to his office and confessed that I had been writing novels In high wrath he exploded. "I knew you couldn't stick to your profession." I collapsed.

"What did you write?" he angrily asked.

"*Ver-ni Vasulat*" I muttered

The name worked as a magic charm. His face dissolved in beaming chuckles. "The story of Tanman Oh! Wonderful! Wonderful!" If he had been eighteen and Tanman had been a reality, many things, I found, would have been in danger.

My way was clear. I was no longer a wretched betrayer of that jealous mistress, law. I had created Tanman. He introduced me to an eminent Jain Solicitor, who shook me by the hands vigorously. I was no longer a junior waiting for his briefs. I had given him in his old age a dream-bride which he possibly had missed all his life.

Tanman took Gujarat by storm. Boys tried to find her in life and sighed. Girls cursed me for having killed so lovely a creature when so young. When I went to the Hindu University four years ago, my only merit, in the eyes of the Gujarati boys

who welcomed me, was to have created her. A young lady in Ahmedabad read the young heroine's tale, and developed a desire to meet the author. It was a dangerous pastime. She met the author seven years afterwards—with what disastrous results you all know. She had to change her name for mine.

Something much more terrific happened to Munja, Prithvi Vallabh, the World's Darling. This king of Malwa of the tenth century was born in Munshi literature in 1918. He was the gay, amoral man, radiating power and love—extracting joy from every moment—true to himself under all conditions, in conquest, in defeat, in prison, in love, when betrayed and sentenced to death. Critics fell on me like voracious tigers—Munja was so immoral! The truth was that in him the readers saw the man who lived as most people wanted to live but dared not.

Prithvi Vallabh went on the stage and after twenty-four years is still some attraction. He had gone into Hindi, Tamil, Bengali; even Sanskrit recently. He went on the silent screen. In Modi's garbled screen version of it, he travelled all over India. I was present at its premiere release at Lahore and I saw how the crowd reacted to the triumphant attitude of Munja to life! To Gandhiji, not familiar with what is art for art's sake, this book was suggested as a specimen. He read it, was unhappy with it and wrote me severely. How I—whom he knew so well—could write it! I humbly replied “I created him when I was a struggling junior. He came out of my imagination, how he came I know not; and since he has come, his vivid personality has found a place in men's hearts. Has he not a right to exist?”

Then I have played on the Mother India theme—in fiction, social and historical, in essay and history. Visions of her ancient grandeur and glorious destiny and portraits of those who have made her what she is during centuries, floated before me.

Thus wise, I created the modern woman with the right to love as she wills and live her own life; the man who is prepared to live the life that he is born to, unabashed and triumphant; the joys of man and woman, the joys of the flesh, of the united minds and the linked wills; the joy of life as it is lived—richly, spontaneously and sinlessly; the vivid worship of the Mother in which our old time love of *Bharat*, our collective urge for social synthesis and our dominant political consciousness were fused and transformed into the triumphant Nationalism of the day; and above all the search for and portrayal of Beauty, rising above and beyond prudery, convention, tradition and the transient fashions of passing generations.

I did not bring these elements to literature—I was but the unconscious vehicle of the Renaissance which the contact with the West has produced in India.

The Renaissance in India is a mighty phenomenon which released the life forces from the thraldom of one thousand five hundred years. In fact since the classical period of Indian Culture, the Gupta Age, no such flowering of Indian genius had been seen. Two cultures, the European and the Indian, impacted on each other and from out of the impact came a revivifying energy which has revolutionised the subconscious of the race.

Writing about this Renaissance, Prof. Mukerji of the Lucknow University, in his work *Indian*

Culture dealt with two generations of its exponents. The first generation according to him was represented by Tagore and Iqbal, the second by Munshi Premchand, Sarat Chandra Chatterjee and myself. But the father of Indian Renaissance was of an earlier generation still. He was Bankim Chandra Chatopadhyaya, the founder of the modern novel, and in a sense, the Seer who saw modern Nationalism in India in its true shape and colour. His creative art and vision gave us a new medium of expression, a new woman and a new man and above all the vision of the Motherland, revealed to us as the Maternal Power in a form of Beauty which can dominate the mind and seize the heart.

For the last thirty-five years I have only humbly carried forward the heritage which he left.

MUNSHI SAHITYA

[in chronological order of publication]

<i>Mari Kamala</i> (Guj.) (Collection of short stories)	..	..	1912
<i>Ver-ni Vasulat</i> (Guj.) (Social Novel)	..	..	1913
<i>Kono Vank ?</i> (Guj.) (Social Novel)	..	..	1915
<i>Patan-ni-Prabhuta</i> (Guj.) (Historical Romance)	..	..	1916
<i>Gujarat-no Nath</i> (Guj.) (Historical Romance)	..	..	1917
<i>Prithvi Vallabh</i> (Guj.) (Historical Romance)	..	..	1920-21
<i>Vava Seth-nu Svatantrya</i> (Guj.) (Social Play)	..	..	1921
<i>Rajadhiraja</i> (Guj.) (Historical Romance)	..	..	1922
<i>Purandara Parajaya</i> (Guj.) (Puranic Play)	..	..	1922
<i>Bhagavan Kautilya</i> (Guj.) (Historical Romance)	..	..	1923
<i>Avibhakta Atma</i> (Guj.) (Puranic Play)	..	..	1923
<i>Svapnadrishta</i> (Guj.) (Social Novel)	..	..	1924
<i>Be Kharab Jan</i> (Guj.) (Social Play)	..	..	1924
<i>Tarpana</i> (Guj.) (Puranic Play)	..	..	1924
<i>Ketlak Lekho</i> (Guj.) (Miscellaneous)	..	..	1926
<i>Ajnankita</i> (Guj.) (Social Play)	..	..	1927
<i>Kaka-ni Shashi</i> (Guj.) (Social Play)	..	..	1928
<i>Putra Samovadi</i> (Guj.) (Puranic Play)	..	..	1929
<i>Dhruvasvamini Devi</i> (Guj.) (Historical Play)	..	..	1929
<i>Sneha Sambhrama</i> (Guj.) (Social Play)	..	..	1931
<i>Shishu Ane Sakhi</i> (Guj.) (Prose-poem)	..	..	1932
<i>Lopamudra</i> Part I (Guj.) (Vedic Novel)	..	..	1933
<i>Thodank Rasa Darshano</i> (Guj.) (Literary studies)	..	..	1933
<i>Adivachano</i> Part I (Guj.) (Addresses)	..	..	1933
<i>Narasaiyo : Bhakta Harino</i> (Guj.) (Biography)	..	..	1933
<i>Lopamudra</i> Parts II and III (Guj.) (Vedic Plays)	..	..	1933
<i>Lopamudra</i> Part IV (Guj.) (Vedic Play)	..	..	1934
<i>Gujarata and Its Literature</i> (Eng.) (History of literature)	..	..	1935

<i>Dr. Madhurika</i> (Guj.) (Social Play and Scenario)	1936
<i>Kulavadhu</i> (Hindi) (Scenario)	1936
<i>The Early Aryans in Gujarat</i> (Eng.) (University Lectures) (Published in 1941)	1938
<i>Narmad</i> (Guj.) (Biography)	1939
<i>Gujarat-ni Asmita</i> (Guj.) (Miscellaneous essays)	1939
<i>Jaya Somanath</i> (Guj.) (Historical Romance)	1940
<i>I Follow The Mahatma</i> (Eng.)	1940
<i>Adivachano</i> Part II (Guj.) (Addresses)	1941
<i>Akhand Hindustan</i> (Eng)	1942
<i>The Glory That was Gurjaradesha</i> Part I (Eng.) (History) ..	1943
<i>Addhe Raste</i> (Guj.) (Autobiography)	1943
<i>Mari Binjavabdar Kahani</i> (Guj.) (Autobiography)	1943
<i>Sidha Chadhan</i> Part I (Guj.) (Autobiography)	1943
<i>Sidha Chadhan</i> Part II (Guj.) (Autobiography)	1943
<i>Imperial Gurjaras</i> (Eng.) (History)	1944
<i>The Indian Deadlock</i> (Eng).	1945
<i>Loma Harshini</i> (Guj.) (Vedic Novel)	1945
<i>The Ruin That Britain Wrought</i> (Eng.)..	1946
<i>The Creative Art of Life</i> (Eng.)..	1946
<i>The Changing Shape of Indian Politics</i> (Eng.).. ..	1946
<i>Bhagwan Parshurama</i> (Guj) (Puranic Novel)	1946
<i>Bhagavad-Gita and Modern Life</i> (Eng.)	1945-47
<i>Gandhi—The Master</i> (Eng.)	1948
<i>Linguistic Provinces and The Future of Bombay</i> (Eng.) ..	1948
<i>Somanath—The Shrine Eternal</i> (Eng.)	1951
<i>Sparks From The Anvil</i> (Eng) (Essays)	1951
<i>Gospel of the Dirty Hand</i> (Eng) (Addresses and Speeches on Land Transformation)	1952
<i>Swapna Siddhi ni Shodhana</i> (Guj.) (Autobiography) ..	1953
<i>Vah re me Vah</i> (Guj) (Fantasy)	1953
<i>Our Greatest Need and Other Addresses</i> (Eng)	1953

<i>To Badrinath</i> (Eng.)	1953
<i>Janu's Death and Other Kulapati's Letters</i> (First Series) (Eng.)	1954
<i>The Glory That was Gurjaradesha</i> (Revised)	1954
<i>City of Paradise and Other Kulapati's Letters</i> (Second Series) (Eng.)	1954
<i>Sparks from The Governor's Anvil</i> (Eng.) (Speeches and articles)	1956
<i>The Wolf Boy and Other Kulapati's Letters</i> (Third Series) (Eng.)	1956
<i>Bhagna Paduka</i> (Guj.) (Historical Romance)	1956
<i>Tapasvini</i> —Vols I and II (Guj.) (Novel)	1957
<i>The Saga of Indian Sculpture</i> (Eng.) (Survey of Art) .. .	1957
<i>The End of an Era—(Hyderabad Memories, 1948)</i> (Eng.) (Reminiscences)	1957
<i>Tapasvini</i> —Vol. III (Guj.) (Novel)	1958

